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How do social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets for intervention

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Shepard Masocha

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How do social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets for intervention?

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A thesis submitted to the University of Dundee in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, the issue of migrants seeking asylum in the United Kingdom has been the subject of increasing media and political attention. The need to provide asylum seekers with culturally sensitive services is widely acknowledged within social work. However, the social work profession continues to draw heavily on outdated views and definitions of racism mainly based on skin colour and biological categorisation. This is in spite of the fact that the late 20th century has witnessed the emergence of “new racism” (Barker, 1981) and xenoracism (Sivanandan, 2001). This thesis uses the concept of xenoracism as a framework for understanding the ever-shifting parameters of exclusionary discourses, and seeks to provide a more in-depth understanding of current social policy for asylum seekers. It achieves this through an analysis of media, governmental and parliamentary discourses on the issues of immigration and asylum. This approach is based on an understanding of how asylum seekers as a social group are constructed and how this process – underpinned by xenoracism – plays a pivotal role in influencing the ways in which social policies relating to asylum seekers are formulated. The study argues that the construction of social policies relating to asylum seekers is inherently racist and as such is in direct conflict with social work’s value system.

The study utilises discursive social psychology (Taylor, 2001, Potter and Wetherell, 1987)), as a methodology for understanding the various ways in which asylum seekers are constructed. This strand of discourse analysis is employed to examine the ways in which society talks and writes about asylum seekers, the social cognition that is the basis of the existing discourses, the socio-political and cultural functions of such discourses and their specific roles in the reproduction of social inequalities.

The thesis explores the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed in social work professionals' discourses. The study identifies a number of interpretative repertoires and linguistic resources that are deployed by social work professionals in their attempts to construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge. The study illustrates that in addition to their professional discourses and repertoires social work professionals also draw on media and parliamentary discourses as discursive resources in their constructions of asylum seekers. These social work professionals' discourses are shown to be argumentatively organised and oriented to these macro discourses. In this respect, this thesis establishes an understanding of how asylum seekers are constructed by social work professionals as it pays particular attention to the ideological basis of such constructs.

The thesis also explores the everyday practices of social work professionals with asylum seeking service users and the specific ways in which these professionals explain and legitimate their practice with asylum seekers. Through paying attention to practitioners' accounting practices, this study provides an insight into some of the ways in which social work professionals produce accounts of competent social work practice and how this is an integral part of a defensive social work discourse.

This thesis highlights the fact that language is one of the central vehicles through which social work takes place. As such, the analysis of social work discourse in its own right as a topic of analysis is a legitimate area of social work research which can lead to an in-depth and enhanced understanding of social work practice. By using discourse analysis as a methodology, this thesis provides a new perspective for

understanding not only social work practice with asylum seekers but also some of the concerns regarding the profession's complicity in racist and oppressive practice.

DECLARATION

This study contains no material which has been accepted for the reward of any other degree or diploma in any other university or other tertiary institution, and to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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PUBLICATIONS

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Here is to a life well lived.

Dedicated to Chance Masocha

1978 - 2009

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees, challenges to meeting the humanitarian needs of displaced persons have become greater and more complex. The last three decades have witnessed an increasing media and political attention to the issue of migrants seeking asylum within the United Kingdom. Although the numbers of immigrants seeking asylum within the United Kingdom peaked at around 84,130 in 2002, falling to 24,485 in 2009 (Groat and McGuinness, 2010), the issue of asylum seeking continues to be highly emotive and politically charged. At practice level, social work professionals are also faced with the formidable challenge of providing services that are both sensitive and responsive to the needs of an increasingly culturally plural service user group. This imperative of providing a culturally sensitive and responsive service is already widely acknowledged within social work, as evidenced by the centrality of anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspectives (Daryl Imple and Burke, 2006, Dominelli, 2008). Studies undertaken on social work practice with asylum seekers (Collett, 2004, Humphries, 2004c, Humphries, 2004a, Jordan and Jordan, 2000, Sales, 2002) largely focus on asylum policies and their impacts on practice. This approach is certainly valid and has resulted in a growing body of informative research, which has significantly led to the emergence of a critical social work perspective for understanding pertinent issues of ethnic diversity and social inclusion. However, as will be demonstrated, social work continues to draw heavily on outdated views and definitions of racism largely based on skin colour and biological categorisation. The late 20th century witnessed the emergence of what have been called ‘new racism’ (Barker, 1982) and ‘xenoracism’ (Sivanandaran, 2001). This study introduces social work to the concept of xenoracism in the hope that this will

challenge the out-dated concepts that still pervade social work. It is anticipated that this will result in practitioners being more aware of the ever shifting parameters of exclusionary discourses and more significantly provide an additional perspective that will provide social work with a more in-depth understanding of how current social policy drivers and social policy itself are permeated by xenoracism. This will be achieved primarily, through an analysis of media and parliamentary discourses as well as social work professionals' discourses on asylum seeking. Such a critical understanding of the centrality of xenoracism in the construction of asylum seekers at this level will enable social work to be more aware of the inevitable ethical dilemmas that emerge between what social work stands for and the current social policy within which social work has to operate.

An important aspect that has remained largely unexplored within social work research is how asylum seekers are constructed as a social group and crucially how this process, which is underpinned by xenoracism, plays a pivotal role in terms of influencing the ways in which social policies relating to asylum seekers are formulated. A notable exception to this is Jones' (1998) assertion that any analysis of the social construction of migrant and immigrant identities should be carried out within the context of examining racism in representation. This study posits that the construction of social policies relating to asylum seekers is inherently racist. The study argues that social work's value system and concepts of anti oppressive and anti-racist practice on their own are inadequate as a basis for understanding and countering prevailing racist policy frameworks for asylum seekers. As such, within social work, there is a lack of a coherent understanding of the nature of the existing policy frameworks for asylum seekers. Yet such an understanding is of particular relevance

to social work practice given that asylum seekers are generally not perceived as part of mainstream society (Sales, 2002), but as an anomaly (Klocker and Dunn, 2003), and there is growing evidence of the differential treatment received by asylum seekers within mainstream welfare services (Harris, 2003, Masocha, 2008, Dumper et al., 2006). An analysis of the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed at various levels of society including at practice level is also of particular interest in the light of the concerns raised in research by Humphries (2004c) and Collette (2004) that social workers are unwittingly complicit in fostering inequality, oppression and social exclusion, which as a profession they purport to challenge.

The study also analyses the linguistic resources that social work professionals deploy in their attempts to construct asylum seekers as service users. It attempts to achieve this through analysing social work professionals' discourses. It explores the everyday practices of social work professionals with their asylum seeking service users and the specific ways in which these professionals explain and legitimate their practice with this group of service users. The central concern of the study is an examination of the meaning making of social work professionals in their work settings by focusing primarily on how they view their asylum seeking service users as well as how they justify and defend their practice. However, the meaning making process is embedded in a much wider context. Although the study takes a *micro approach* in its analysis, since its primary interest is on social work professionals' discourses and how they make sense of their everyday practice with asylum seeking service users, there is a need to acknowledge that such local meanings are embedded wider contexts and discourses. This is because the everyday interactions within social work practice with asylum seekers are also influenced by general discourses in society. Social workers

are also influenced by the wider discourses in society which certainly have a significant influence on their practice. Geertz (1973, p.5) refers to these as the wider “webs of significance”. As such, social work professionals have other frames of reference outside their professional discourses which they can draw on to make sense of the tasks associated with their day to day practice with asylum seekers. As a result, as already stated the study includes the analysis of media and parliamentary discourses that can be identified as *macro* discourses and a historical which can help to explain, put into perspective and enhance the understanding of the local discourses.

In order to achieve this, the study utilises discourse analysis as a methodology for understanding the various ways in which asylum seekers are constructed. The term discourse analysis is utilised in this study as a generic term which encompasses research that focuses on language in its social and cognitive contexts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis attempts to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the rules and strategies of language use influence subjectivities and interactions, and vice versa (van Dijk, 1997a). Thus, discourse analysis is employed in this study as part of an attempt to examine the ways in which society talks and writes about asylum seekers, the social cognition that is the basis of the existing discourses, the socio-political and cultural functions of such discourses and their specific roles in the reproduction of social inequalities. The study explores some of the interpretative repertoires that are employed in the construction of asylum seekers and the various linguistic resources that are deployed by social work professionals in their attempts to explain and legitimate their practice with this service user group.

The construction of the service user in social work practice

The importance of the service user to the social work process can hardly be over emphasised. It should also be noted that the increased visibility and importance of 'the service user' is also closely linked with New Labour's modernisation agenda (Cowden and Singh, 2007) which has seen the emergence of a discourse that places service users at the centre of service provision within welfare services.

However, the service user is a much more nebulous and complex idea. The service user ostensibly is at the core of social work. According to Juhila et al (2003, p.11), the service user is "considered if not the only, then at least an essential target of and motivation for social work." In fact, it is possible to define social work practice and methods through service users. For instance, social work practice can be characterised as service-user centred. This notion of putting service users at the centre of the social work process has indeed become a self-evident social work ideal in all practice areas. For instance, in terms of working with children this ideal is one of the main underpinning principles behind child care legislation in Scotland, England and Wales. The accompanying assessment frameworks further reinforce this ideal (Department of Health, 2000, Scottish Executive, 2005). In social work practice with adults, the notion of placing the service user as the focus of social work activities is also very clear.

Given the centrality of the service user to the social work process, it is important to appreciate how service users are constituted within social work. Such an analysis should begin with an acknowledgement of the fact that the concept of a service user is not a fixed identity. Instead, a service user is socially constructed. Although, this study pays attention to the mechanisms and processes that are involved in the

construction of service user identity with particular reference to language use, it also explicitly acknowledges that the prevailing cultural, political and economic contexts are also highly relevant factors to the process. While the service user may be socially constructed, the process of construction is a convoluted process in which other factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, etc., play a role. Juhila et al (2003) have argued that the identity of 'service user' is only one of the many identities a service user may have. They explain that "In addition, to clienthood, there are many positions or actions which are meaningful for the individual and have often more significance than clienthood" (Juhila et al., 2003, p.13). Therefore, a service user is not a fixed identity and as such should not be accepted as given but as a situational narrative state and such an interpretation is one that is largely subject to change depending on the prevailing contexts.

Social work theories also play a significant role in the construction of the service user. The service user can be conceptualised differently depending on theoretical perspectives. David Howe (1987) discusses in detail the impact of different theoretical strands to the ways in which an individual can be defined, explained and positioned as a service user. For instance, a social worker informed by psychoanalytic theory is likely to conceptualise the service user in terms of the service user's internal psychological state. This will differ fundamentally from the way service users are conceptualised by a social worker informed by a radical social work approach, which will construct the service user in relation to prevailing political and socio-economic structures. Therefore, the theories that underpin practice can have a fundamental influence on the linguistic resources that are made available resulting in a significant divergence in terms of how an individual is conceptualised and eventually constructed

as a service user. This in turn will have a fundamental impact on the form of intervention that the professional opts for.

Furthermore, the nature of social work itself as a profession has a fundamental bearing on the construction of service users. Social work's ambivalent role in social control and management, and how as a result the profession is not invariably a 'helping' profession has been well researched (Chambon et al., 1999, Collett, 2004, Humphries, 2004c, Briskman and Cemlyn, 2005, MacLaughlin, 1999, Harris, 2003, Chase, 2010, Hjärne et al., 2010). According to Juhila et al (2003, p.13), social work also involves "managing and categorising people in order to control a range of deviations and to make people compatible with the outlooks of institutions based on normalising people." Therefore due to the nature of social work practice, "bodies and souls" (Foucault, 1979) are categorised, ordered and corrected. These aspects of the social work profession can have serious consequences on the ways in which the service user is constructed. Therefore, the role of the social work profession, in so far as implementing government policy is concerned and the problems related to social work's professional identity, significantly makes this inquiry into the everyday practices of social work in which service user identities are constructed, maintained, modified and discarded very apposite.

This study seeks to provide a discursive approach to understanding how service users are constructed within social work by paying particular attention to the ways in which linguistic resources are deployed in the construction of asylum seeking service users. Such an approach is largely undeveloped within social work research, as will be illustrated. The manner in which asylum seekers are constructed as a social group and

the very identity of asylum seekers is heavily contested in contemporary discourses. This has a significant bearing on their construction as service users. The identity of asylum seekers is contested by different organisations and individuals all of which have a vested interest in the asylum system and in the manner in which asylum seekers are constructed. In most of these cases, the interests are conflicting. In their attempts to construct the identity of asylum seekers, the various interlocutors invoke particular arguments and deploy a plethora of linguistic resources which result in the creation of an identity that suits their particular vested interests. For instance, Phillips and Hardy (1997) have argued that one of the arenas of conflict in the contest to establish an asylum seeker identity is around issues of human rights and national sovereignty. These attempts at constructing an identity for asylum seekers also draw on discursive resources such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights as well as texts such as government reports and media discourses in a bid to come up with a particular construct of asylum seekers. According to Phillips and Hardy (1997) this broad range of texts produces an object of knowledge – an asylum seeker – that is subject to change over time in tandem with discourse changes. As such, discourses play an active role in the construction of asylum seekers as an object of knowledge and have a significant influence in the ways in which asylum seekers as a service user group can be portrayed, understood and subsequently treated in the wider society. As such, it is highly appropriate and relevant that a discursive approach is undertaken to examine the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed by social work professionals as a service user group and also how these professionals explain and legitimate their practice with asylum seekers.

New Racism and Xenoracism

A defining characteristic of the new racism is that it is so subtle that it is very difficult to identify and can easily go unnoticed. This subtlety of the new racism has led Wetherell and Potter (1992) to conclude that analytic frameworks that define racism in terms of beliefs of biological superiority and the use of overt derogatory racist language risk becoming obsolete. According to Potter and Wetherell:

Even the relatively blatant fascist propaganda and blatant advocates of racism (such as Le Pen in France) have learnt to modify their discourse so that on some occasions racism can occur without biological categorisation and the more familiar paraphernalia of 'advanced' and 'primitive,' 'negative' and 'positive,' 'superior' and 'inferior' distinctions. Given this flexibility of the enemy, and the way debates move on, it seems sensible not to commit oneself to one exclusive characterisation of racist claims. There is a danger of being silenced when racist discourse continues to oppress but no longer meets the main characteristics of social scientific definitions of racism (1992, p. 71-72).

It is therefore important that social work develops an awareness of the fact that racism can occur in various forms. For instance, the notion of *otherness* that characterises the prevailing discourses of asylum seekers fits well with this new type of racism. As will be demonstrated in chapters 4 and 5, the prevailing discourses are preoccupied with who should be included or excluded from mainstream British society. As Gilroy (1992, p.45), notes the new racism is also

... primarily concerned with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. It specifies who may belong legitimately and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment

of those whose origin, [or] sentiment of citizenship assigns them elsewhere.

It is therefore important that social work develops a critical understanding of how social policy drivers and social policy itself are permeated by these subtle forms of racism, which this study will identify as xenoracism. This study seeks to make a contribution to such an understanding.

The last three decades have witnessed a significant increase in the amount of discursive research on race, immigration and asylum seekers. For instance, van Dijk (1984, 1987 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1997) has researched extensively on the new racism in relation to immigration and asylum seekers and also illustrated how these trends in the Netherlands are also replicated in other countries including the United Kingdom. In their analysis of Austrian political discourse, Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2009, p.3) note that the right wing political parties have “refined their electoral programs under the rubric of national populist slogans and adopted more subtle forms of racism”. Effectively these parties have moved away from overt neo-fascist discourses. Thus the exclusionary tendencies of their discourses are no longer articulated in overt racial terms, which for instance refer explicitly to biological or racial terms. Instead, social characteristics are deployed as discursive resources aimed at distinguishing citizens from the undesirable immigrants who are depicted as ‘not wanting to work’, ‘a drain on public resources’, and ‘not wanting to integrate’. In New Zealand, Wetherell and Potter (1992, p.70) studied racism in terms of “discourse which has the effect of categorising, allocating and discriminating between certain groups.” They studied the effects predominantly by applying a “practical skepticism to the discourse of white New Zealanders in order, as title has it, to provide a map of

racist language” (Hammersley, 2003, p.803). Other parts of the developed western world have also seen the growth of similar research including Australia (Augoustinos et al., 2005, Augoustinos, 2001) and Belgium (Blommaert, 2005). The UK has also witnessed the growth of discursive research which seeks to examine this new racism (Reeves, 1983, Fowler, 1991, van Dijk, 1997b, Billig, 1988, Lynn and Lea, 2003). The common denominator of this extensive body of discursive research is the analysis of contemporary racist discourse. The research focuses on how linguistic resources are deployed to achieve the high levels of subtlety that are characteristic of the new racism. The research also focuses on how the new racism is characterised by covert talk yet at the same time it successfully articulates exclusionary and oppressive views. The various studies cited above also share a consensus that in terms of its effects, the new racism is not different from the ‘old fashioned’ racism because it justifies and legitimates inequalities as well as exclusionary tendencies. As such, there is an imperative for social work to be aware and conversant in these aspects of new racism if the current concerns about social work’s complicity in oppressive and racist practices are to be successfully addressed.

It is important to note here that the notion of the *emergence* of a ‘new racism’ should not be accepted at face value as there is a danger of obscuring the historical continuities that are evident in the history of racist discourses. For instance, the subtle expression of racial prejudice, a defining characteristic of new racism (and xenoracism itself), did not begin in the second half of the 20th century. As Leach (2005) illustrates, the expression of racial prejudice in ‘subtle’, ‘symbolic’, indirect and covert ways existed well before the second half of the 20th century. It is also worth noting that the blatant expression of racism based on biological categorisation,

which is characteristic of ‘old fashioned’ racism continues to exist in contemporary British society. In fact, one can argue justifiably that there is nothing ‘new’ about the current ways of expressing racial prejudice that are being identified as ‘new racism’. Therefore, the notion of a ‘new racism’ should not obscure important historical continuities. Essentially, what happens in the second half of the 20th century is a decisive shift in the manner in which racist sentiments are couched. Predominantly, blatant expressions of racism have been replaced (but not eliminated) by a subtle variety known as ‘modern’ (McConahay, 1986), symbolic (Kinder and Sears, 1981) and ‘new racism’ (Barker, 1981). As society has become increasingly intolerant of blatant expressions of racial prejudice, a *coded discourse* has emerged which is understandable through semantic and pragmatic cues to wider audiences (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). The extent to which such discourses are coded is largely dependent upon the level of tolerance within individual European countries.

It is also important to note that, the discourses of asylum seeking are so complex and fluid in nature that the concept of new racism on its own as an analytical framework may not result in a comprehensive analysis. It is also important to note that talking about racism, whether traditional or new type, conjures up images of white people pitted against black people yet, as Card et al (2005) showed there was no strong difference in attitudes towards immigration between people from ethnic minorities and those from the majority ethnic group in the UK. In any case, the racial composition of asylum seekers within the United Kingdom militates against using skin colour as a basis for analysis as asylum seekers are made up of different races. For instance, some of the asylum seekers from Zimbabwe and Eastern Europe are white. This shows the complex nature of the discourses at play. Therefore, there is a

need to extend the analytical framework by combining new racism with the concept of xenophobia to come up with a new framework, xenoracism. Sivanandaran defines xenoracism as:

...a racism that is not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial territories, but the newer categories of the displaced, the dispossessed and the uprooted, who are beating at Western Europe's doors ... It is racism, that cannot be colour-coded, directed as it is at poor whites as well, and is therefore passed off as xenophobia, a 'natural' fear of strangers. But in the way it degenerates and reifies people before segregating and /or expelling them, it is a xenophobia that bears all the marks of ... racism. It is racism in substance, but 'xeno' in form (2001, p.2).

Therefore, xenoracism is a form of 'new racism' which is coded to disguise a very strong opposition to immigrants. In spite of the apparent absence of definable targeted 'races', the discourse effectively reproduces racism all the same. Xenoracism is mainly associated with a disdainful type of prejudice aimed at the discrimination, exclusion, and marginalisation of targeted individuals and groups of immigrants. The targets are identified not so much based on phenotypical features such as skin colour but on the basis of a perception of foreignness. Thus, the discourse has strong connections with discrimination because it targets individuals on the basis of perceived identity, cultural, and religious difference. Augoustinos and Every (2007, p.124) have noted that "social taboos against expressing racist sentiments have led to the development of discursive strategies that present negative views of out-groups as reasonable and justified while at the same time protecting the speakers from charges of racism and prejudice". Therefore, the xenoracist discourse is strategically and

rhetorically organised to deny racism. As such, this study will demonstrate that xenoracism is a salient feature in the manner in which asylum seekers in the United Kingdom are perceived, constructed and subsequently treated particularly in media and parliamentary discourses. This study therefore uses xenoracism as an analytical framework for understanding the underlying attitudes and motives behind the various ways in which asylum seekers are constructed and subsequently treated. The prefix “xeno” comes from the Greek word *xenos* which means alien. In ancient times, this meant anyone that was not Greek and therefore regarded as a barbarian. However, paradoxically, perhaps, the word *xenos* also means guest. In fact, there is a running thread through ‘European’ society that carries these two meanings in tension, as will be noted particularly in Chapter 5.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis explores the ways in which social work professionals construct asylum seekers and how they explain and legitimate their practice with this service user group. In order to do this, Chapters 2 and 3 present the theoretical approach and methodology that guide this research study. This study uses a strand of discourse analysis called discursive social psychology to analyse the ways in which asylum seeking service users are constructed by social work professionals. Chapter 4 provides an overview of British asylum policies. The aim is to provide a historical backdrop against which the subsequent chapters on asylum seeking discourses can be understood. Essentially, the chapter shows how current social policies relating to asylum seekers have evolved and how these policies are permeated by xenoracism as evidenced by the fact that the need to exclude asylum seekers is a theme that runs throughout all legislative provisions regulating asylum seeking. Chapter 5 analyses

the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed in media and parliamentary discourses. The rationale for this chapter is that it provides a wider context for understanding the discourses of social work professionals regarding asylum seekers. This is primarily because the media and parliamentary discourses are part of the wider frames of reference that are available to social work professionals in their attempts to make sense of asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets for social work intervention. The media and politicians also have a significant influence on social work practice and the profession itself. Another key function of Chapter 5 is that it also provides a methodological pilot for the main part of the thesis. Discursive social psychology is employed to illuminate and identify some of the interpretative repertoires that are used and some of the linguistic resources that are deployed in the construction of asylum seekers. Chapter 6 draws on data collected from interviews conducted for this study to discuss the interpretative repertoires and the linguistic resources that are deployed by social work professionals in the construction of asylum seekers within their work settings. Of particular interest to this chapter is the ways in which social work professionals draw on other frames of reference, such as the macro discourses discussed in Chapter 5, to make sense of their service users in addition to their own professional discourses. Chapter 7 then examines the accounting practices of social work professionals. It pays particular attention to the ways in which professionals seek in their accounts to justify and legitimate their practice with asylum seekers. The chapter pays particular attention to the linguistic strategies that social work professionals deploy and effect of such strategies. Chapter 8 reviews the findings and the implications of this study on social work practice and research.

Chapter 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This study uses critical discursive social psychology as a theoretical and methodological approach to analyse spoken and written language as it is used to enact social and cultural perspectives as well as social identities. Within this study, the term discourse analysis is be used as a generic term which encompasses research that focuses on language in its social and cognitive contexts (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis attempts to provide a comprehensive analysis of how language use influences beliefs and interaction, and vice versa, how aspects of interaction influence how people speak or how beliefs control language use and interaction (van Dijk, 1997a). Discourse analysis is employed as part of this study's research methodology as part of an attempt to examine:

- a) the ways in which social work professionals construct asylum seekers
- b) the kind of thinking and sense making that is behind the existing discourses and
- c) the various functions that such discourses and cognition serve especially in relation to the reproduction of social inequalities.

The term discourse has been used in a wide range of ways by researchers to mean different things. Van Dijk (1997a) defines discourse as a form of language use or more generally as spoken language or ways of speaking. For some researchers, discourse refers to all forms of talk and writing. For other researchers, the term refers only to the ways in which talk is meshed together. Another school of thought led by Foucault interprets discourse in a much broader sense and links it to the historically

developing linguistic practice. According to Foucault (1972, p.80), “Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word “discourse,” I believe I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements”. Therefore, three main meanings of the term discourse can be identified within Foucault’s work:

- *A general domain of all statements* – this is a more general and wider meaning that encompasses all texts or utterances, which have meaning and have some effect in the world. This is a definition that that Foucault largely uses in his earlier work in which he discusses the concept of discourse at a theoretical level.
- *An individualizable group of statements* – this is a definition that Foucault adopts to discuss particular structures within discourses. He uses this definition to enable him to identify discourses i.e. groups of utterances/texts which seem to be regulated in some ways and which seem to have a coherence and force that is common to them (Mills, 1997). It is within the context of this definition that it is possible to identify various types of discourses such as discourse of femininity, discourses of colonialism and post colonialism, discourses of racism etc.
- *A regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements* – within this definition Foucault is largely more concerned with the rules and structures that govern and produce particular utterances or texts than the actual utterances or texts. Therefore, within this

definition it is the rule-governed nature of the discourse that assumes importance.

Clearly, there is no one definition of discourse. In fact, according to Mills (1997), within most discourse theorists' work, these various definitions are used almost interchangeably and one can be laid over the other. However, for the purposes of this study, the term discourse is used in a "more open sense to cover all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.7) that are used every day to construct asylum seekers.

Critical Discursive Social Psychology

This study uses a strand of discourse analysis called critical discursive psychological approach. This study of discourse analysis is useful in providing an explanation of how the issue of asylum seekers is interpreted and explained both at society and political levels. It achieves this through its particular focus on the construction and use of categories in relation to situated discursive practices (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The way society and politicians talk about asylum seekers and define them as a distinct category of immigrants performs a variety of social functions with different ideological and social consequences. As a result, this study relies on critical discursive social psychology in its attempts to achieve an in-depth understanding of the various ways in which asylum seekers are constructed.

Social psychological approaches to discourse analysis are commonly associated with the works of Parker (1992), and Potter and Wetherell (1987). Two versions of discourse analytic work have been influential in the development of critical social

psychology. Danziger (1997) refers to two versions of social constructionist psychology: a 'dark' version and a 'light' version.

The 'dark' version, also referred to by Gough and MacFadden (2001) as a 'top-down' approach, is largely represented in the discourse analytic work of Edwards and Potter (1992). The works of post-structural theorists such as Foucault and Derrida largely inspire this. The 'top-down' orientation of this version lends it to a macro orientation to discourse analysis. This version seeks to identify discourses that influence and shape society's views. Within this version, discourses are seen as the key building blocks through which political and personal dynamics operate. Discourses are therefore viewed as a coherent system of meanings that are in competition with each other, with discursive ascendancy manifesting itself in the corridors of political power (Tuffin, 2005). A perspective that places people within the historical and cultural workings of key institutions largely influences this 'top-down' definition of discourse. As such, dominant discourses are seen as working to legitimate particular ideologies and power relations within a society.

The 'light' version of critical discursive social psychology is largely represented by the work of Potter, Wetherell and Edwards (Edwards and Potter, 1992, Potter, 1987). Gough and MacFadden (2001) refer to this strand of discursive psychology as the 'bottom-up' approach mainly because it lends itself to a micro-styled analysis. It is primarily for this reason that this approach is chosen as the methodological and theoretical approach for this study in its attempts to analyse the various ways in which asylum seekers are constructed. The micro orientation of this approach means that there is a preoccupation and strong interest in the interactive features of talk and text.

Potter and Wetherell spearheaded this approach to discourse analysis. Potter and Wetherell (1987) argued for an approach to study social life that privileged talk and text. This signified a major departure from traditional psychology in which talk and text were simply treated as another means or road to another level of abstraction. Thus, this micro approach to discourse analysis sees language per se as a topic of research rather than a medium for the consideration of some other topics such as memory or attribution.

Within this paradigm, discursive social psychology exhibits two main features at the level of epistemology and ontology. These are:

- i. It is anti-realist – critical discursive social psychology challenges the notion that there is an external ‘reality’ that can be objectively grasped and understood
- ii. It is constructionist – this is a recognition that discourse constitutes a selection from many viable alternative representations of ‘reality’ and that any given depiction of ‘reality’ is essentially built up.

Therefore, language is presented as *constructing* psychological and social reality. As such there are no objective truths out there waiting to be discovered by the researcher. Instead, according to Coyle (2000), language in the form of discourse constitutes the building blocks of “social reality.” Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.7) agree that the analysis of discourse serves to illustrate and emphasise the extent to which social realities are linguistically constructed and also helps to gain a better “understanding of social life and social interaction from our study of texts.” It is in this respect that discourse analysis is sometimes regarded as a social constructionist approach to research.

The social constructionist perspective critically challenges the ways in which people take for granted the ways in which they themselves interpret the world as “real” and “objective” entities (Burr, 1995). Such ways of understanding are seen as a product built up through social processes especially linguistic interactions and as such are historically and culturally specific. This emphasis on the role of language as a constructive tool is one of the major defining attributes of critical discursive social psychology. Therefore, language use is viewed as a process that involves selection from a range of linguistic resources available to the language user and using this to construct a version of events. However, there is need to note that this process of selection is not necessarily done in an intentional way. According to Coyle (2000, p. 252), the language user may not even “be able to articulate the constructive process in which they are engaged but it does not mean that it does not exist. It simply highlights the extent to which the constructive use of language is a fundamental, taken-for-granted aspect of social life.”

Discourse is far from being neutral since certain acts are accomplished when people talk or write. In this respect, critical discursive psychology is concerned with the actual strategies that people employ and the different kinds of effects that are accomplished. A central concern of this study is to analyse the linguistic resources that are deployed in the construction of asylum seekers by social work professionals and how these professionals explain and legitimate their practice with this group of service users. A key feature of critical discursive social psychology is that it aims to examine the specific ways in which language is employed to achieve specific needs. There is a realisation that language is routinely used to achieve predetermined goals

such as justifications and explanations that take into account how other people may judge such actions, motives and intentions. Such accounts therefore take into account questions of responsibility, blame, and accountability which are key concerns for this study. In fact, there is some level of psychological investment on the part of those offering such accounts which give rise to what Edwards and Potter (1992) have characterised as the dilemma of stake. Critical discursive psychology acknowledges that such statements can never be made from a neutral perspective. This is because those offering accounts and descriptions are seen within this tradition as having a vested interest in the kinds of descriptions they make and conclusions they draw. Therefore, critical discursive social psychology is chosen as the preferred theoretical approach and methodology for this study because it examines how language is used to construct versions of the world, in this case asylum seekers, and pays particular attention to what is gained from these constructions (Coyle, 2000). In relation to asylum seekers, the ways in which such vested interests are managed in accounts that are given, in media and parliamentary discourses as well as the accounts of social work practice given in the interviews conducted for this study, are of particular interest to this study. It is also important to emphasise that such vested interests can manifest themselves in various ways which may include hiding such interests, denying them, acknowledging them or discounting them.

Critical discursive social psychology also promotes the action orientation of language use. This is due to the fact that people achieve a lot through the complex ways in which they structure and manage their talk. According to Tuffin (2005), much of the social business is transacted in and through language. As a result, one of the key aims of critical discursive psychology is to understand the dynamics within which such

transactions occur. In this respect, Harre and Gillet (1994) see the following as the two main aims of discursive social psychology:

- i. Identification of linguistic resources and
- ii. An examination of how these linguistic resources are put into work

These aims are at the core of the approach that this study adopts to analyse the relevant discourses relating to asylum seekers. Along the same lines, Potter (1996) distinguishes two defining characteristics of discourse analysis. These characteristics include the particular emphasis that the approach places on the examination of discourse as a social practice and the analysis of the actual linguistic resources that are employed to facilitate those practices. For Potter (2004), discourse analysis should primarily be concerned with addressing the following questions:

- i. What is this discourse doing?
- ii. How is this discourse constructed to make this happen?
- iii. What linguistic resources are made available to perform and achieve this activity?

Drawing primarily from this strand of critical discursive psychology, this research is largely concerned with the actual strategies that are employed in trying to create different kinds of effect in the construction of asylum seekers by various interlocutors in the discourses selected for this study.

These central concerns of critical discursive social psychology can also be best understood by an appreciation of some of the key themes of the tradition. Gill (2000) has identified four main themes:

- i. *Discourse is a topic*; this approach to discourse analysis sees discourse as a topic and focus of inquiry in its own right as already stated.

- ii. *Language is constitutive*; – as already noted, discourse is seen as a way of constituting a particular view of social ‘reality’. In establishing this view of ‘reality,’ conscious and deliberate choices are made regarding the most appropriate ways of representing the view. The view that is then presented reflects the disposition of the person responsible for developing it.
- iii. *Discourse is a form of action*; language is seen within this tradition as a way of accomplishing specific acts such as attributing blame, presenting an argument or presenting oneself in a particular light. As such, understanding the context within which a particular discourse is produced becomes an issue of paramount importance particularly in this study.
- iv. *Discourse is rhetorically organised*; given that discourse is concerned with “establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions” (Gill, 2000, p.176), there is a need to identify the various linguistic resources that are employed to achieve this as well as those other discourses that a given discourse may be oriented to.

Before considering how asylum seekers are constructed as objects of knowledge there is need to discuss two important aspects that are important to the paradigm of discourse analysis; power and ideology.

Discourse and Power

Another aspect that deserves consideration is how power is conceptualised within the paradigm of discourse analysis. This study draws heavily from Foucault’s (1972) analysis power . Unlike the Marxist view which considers power as sovereign and the preserve of a powerful minority, Foucault treats as present in all forms of social interaction (Minson, 1980). It is considered that power does not operate through force

or consent, but rather discourse plays a central in the manner in which power is exercised. The dominant discourses are perceived playing a significant role in terms of influencing people's belief systems, ideas. These dominant discourses also have a key role in normalising these belief systems and in the ways in which individual subjects are constituted. Therefore dominant discourses play a key role in "shaping grids and hierarchies for institutional categorization and treatment of people who are the subject of the discourses" (Luke, 1995, p.8). Influence is exercised through established systems and methods of surveillance, which include internalised or inner surveillance of conduct. Therefore studying discourse in own right as a topic for analysis provides opportunities to analyse the sites where power is exercised.

However, within the dominant discourses there are spaces for resistance. There is the potential for the emergence of oppositional pedagogies. Given that power is socially constructed in discourse it is also possible that power can be reconstituted within discourse. As such, power should be not conceptualised as indomitable, but rather as susceptible to change and dismantling, and certainly it is not one directional (Said, 1986). The dominant discourses can treated as disabling and enabling; and characterised with "absences and silences ... contradictions and ambivalences ... lapses and limits ... confusions and double binds" (Epstein and Johnson, 1998, p.44). It is in this context that those on whom power is exercised, e.g. asylum seekers in this study, cannot merely be conceptualised as victims of institutional discourses as they are also capable of both resisting and becoming complicity in their own regulation (Luke, 1995) and even their own marginalisation.

In this respect, the social work professional's discourses in this study are analysed for their enabling as well as disabling capabilities (Foss and Rogers, 1994). They are also analysed for their ability to change, render acceptable, or conceal dominant relations of power and practice (Lemke, 1995).

Discourse and ideology

The selective characteristics of discourse in the process of the construction of any representation of 'reality' leads to a requirement to understand how ideologies are formulated, reproduced and reinforced through discourse. Ideology can be understood as shared beliefs or social representations that are used to accomplish everyday social practices. Within the paradigm of discourse analysis, it is accepted that these social beliefs are organised into systems, which are deployed, by social classes and other groups in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works. Foucault (1979) views ideology as forms of power/knowledge justifying the actions of *all* groups. Foucault (1979) argues that all groups, including the marginal and subordinate groups, have ideologies and as such are implicated in power relations. The only differences between the groups lie in the degree of power and differing substantive world perspectives.

Barker and Galasinski (2001, p.66) define ideologies as "discourses which give meaning to material objects and social practices, they define and produce the acceptable and intelligible ways of understanding the world while excluding other ways of reasoning as unintelligible." Gramsci (1971) equates ideologies to "a religion understood in the secular sense of the unity of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct" (cited in, Barker and Galasinski, 2001, p.67).

This means that ideologies serve to provide people with rules of practical conduct and moral behaviour. For Billig (1988) discourse is a state of power struggle in which the ideologies implicated by discursive choices are the subject of struggles for dominance within and between social groups.

Within this study, the role of ideology in discourse is generally seen as that of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. According to Cameron (2001, p.124), “the way certain realities get talked or written about – that is, the choices speakers and writers make in doing it – are not just random but ideologically patterned. These choices do much of the work of naturalizing particular social arrangements which serve particular interests, so that in time they may come to seem like the only possible and rational arrangements.” As such, in terms of ideology this study is interested in exploring the various ways in which language mediates ideology in the various social and political institutions and welfare apparatus relevant to asylum seekers. Of particular interest will be the analysis of ideology as the study of the ways in which knowledge and meanings regarding asylum seekers are constructed and conveyed through symbolic forms. As such, the study investigates the various social contexts within which the symbolic forms are employed and deployed in the construction of asylum seekers. It also takes a particular interest in whether such forms establish or sustain relations of domination. The role of ideology in discourse is therefore central to the study’s attempts to establish an in depth understanding of the manner in which asylum seekers are constructed and the naturalization of the resulting constructs.

Asylum seekers as objects of knowledge

This study considers asylum seekers as objects of knowledge. Before social workers can intervene in the lives of asylum seeking service users, they need to develop some working knowledge of the asylum seekers who present themselves to social services. This section discusses how this is achieved with particular reference to Foucault's (1972) analysis of how concepts and objects are formed within a body of knowledge.

Formation of concepts

The formation of objects of knowledge is closely associated with how concepts are formed within a body of knowledge. Concepts constitute what Harre (1979) refers to as the expressive sphere: all the conceptual ideas that make up people's cultural backgrounds. According to Phillips and Hardy (1997, p.167), within discourse analysis:

... concepts refer to all the constructions that arise out of the structured sets of texts and exist in the realm of ideas. They are more or less contested, and are culturally and historically situated. They are the fundamental ideas that underlie our understandings and relations with one another.

Therefore, this means that concepts can be interpreted as historically contingent constructions. This is because concepts essentially emanate from a discourse which consists of texts that have been produced in relation to a given a given situation and period. Thus, concepts are largely dependent on the on-going construction of texts for their meaning. As such, concepts are also liable to change from one social group to another. Given that the meaning that is attached to a concept depends on prevailing discourses and that an understanding of the world depends on these concepts, it therefore follows that participation in the prevailing discourses has the potential to

transform the way the world is understood. This is due to the fact that discursive acts that prevail will also succeed in transforming concepts and will most certainly change the world as it is conceptualised. According to Phillips and Hardy (1997, p.167) “discursive acts that are intended to redefine concepts are attempts to fashion preferable social relations, which depend for their success on the resources available to the actor producing the text.” Therefore, in terms of this study, the idea of an *asylum seeker* is essentially a concept that was originally defined by United Nation’s conventions and protocols relating to displaced people and continues to be subject to renegotiation in various signatory countries over time. As a concept, its meaning and relevance keeps changing and is largely dependent on the availability of new texts relating to ways of talking asylum seekers, and prevailing attitudes towards those seeking sanctuary in signatory countries.

Formation of objects of discourse

Before social workers can intervene in the lives of their asylum seeking service users, they need to develop some working knowledge of the asylum seekers who present themselves to social services. This process involves making sense of the asylum seeking service user as the object of knowledge. Foucault (1972) provides a significant insight into the nature and formation of objects of knowledge. Objects of knowledge are also known as objects of discourse. According to Fairclough (1993), objects of discourse include not only all the entities which disciplines or sciences recognise as areas of interest and take up as targets of investigation, but they also include all entities recognised in ordinary life. For instance, Foucault (1972) gives the example of the constitution of madness as an object of knowledge in the discourse of psychopathology from the 18th century onwards. Similarly, Keat and Abercrombie

(1990) give the example of ‘race’ and ‘nation’ as objects of discourse in contemporary media and political discourses.

In his analysis of discourse, Foucault (1972) advances a constitutive view of discourse. This entails viewing discourse as constructing or constituting society in various ways, one of which is the constitution objects of knowledge. The insight that Foucault gives in respect of the formation of objects of discourse is that objects are not only constituted but are also transformed in discourse in accordance with the rules of a particular discursive formation as opposed to existing independently and merely being talked about in a particular discourse (Fairclough, 1993). Foucault does not treat madness as a stable and inert object of discourse. Instead, madness is treated as an object of knowledge that is subject to and undergoes continuous transformations not only between discursive formations but also within the discursive formations. As such, according to Fairclough (1993) a discursive formation needs to be discussed in a way that takes into consideration the transformation of the objects of discourse. Foucault (1972, p.32) states that “the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed.”

The ‘space’ that Foucault is referring to can be defined in a given discourse formation in terms of a relationship between specific “institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterisation” (Foucault, 1972, p.45). It is this relationship which constitutes the rules that govern the formation of discourses. What Foucault is suggesting, according to Fairclough (1993, p.42), is that a discursive formation

constitutes objects that are highly constrained, “where the constraints on what happens “inside” a discursive formation are a function of the inter-discursive formations, and the relations between discursive and non-discursive practices that make up that discursive formation.”

Discourse analysis is based on the assumption that all objects are meaningful and as such their meanings are conferred by historically specific systems of rules. Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) in their explanation of the concept of objects of discourse have given the example of a forest that happens to be in the path of a proposed motorway. They state that the forest

... may simply be represent an inconvenient obstacle impeding the rapid implementation of a new road system, or might be viewed as a site of special interest for scientists and naturalists, or a symbol of the nation’s threatened natural heritage. Whatever, the case its meaning depends on the orders of discourse that constitute its identity and significance. In discourses of economic modernisation, trees may be understood as the disposable means for (or obstacles to) economic growth and prosperity, whereas in environmentalist discourses they may represent essential components of a viable of an eco-system or objects of intrinsic value or beauty (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000pp. 2-3).

Within each of these constructs, there is a clear link between trees as objects of knowledge and the ways in which the trees are viewed and subsequently treated within these discourses. For instance, the subject positions that are adopted by ‘developers’, ‘environmentalists’ or ‘eco-warriors’ are directly oriented to their

interpretations of trees as objects of knowledge as well as ways in which they would like the trees to be treated.

Therefore, what emerges clearly is that *all* objects, including asylum seekers, can be objects of discourse given that their “meanings depend upon a socially constructed system of rules”(Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p.3). However, this does not mean that everything should necessarily be explained in terms of discourse or deny the existence of the physical ontological existence of the world. On the contrary, according to Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000, p.4), such a perspective “circumvents such scepticism and idealism” by emphasising that “we are always internal to a world of signifying practices and objects.” In this context, any attempt to conceptualise the world from an extra-discursive perspective becomes logically self-contradictory. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p.108):

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs in the here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’ depends upon the structuring of the discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of emergence.

Therefore, what is of significance here for discourse analysis is the contention that discourse is constitutive because it contributes to the production, transformation and

reproduction of objects of knowledge (Foucault, 1972). More importantly, this ascribes to discourse an active relation to the constitution of the world. This is in sharp contrast to the referential perspective, within traditional linguistics, in which language essentially plays acts as a window to an existing reality that is waiting to be discovered. Within such a perspective, the relationship between language and the social world is portrayed as one that is passive and limited to merely referring to objects which are taken to be a given in reality (Fairclough, 1993). In the words of Heidegger (, 1973; cited in Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000) human beings are *thrown into* and inhabit a world that is characterised by meaningful discourses and practices. As such it is difficult to make sense of objects outside discourse. Thus, the identities of objects of discourse are a product of prevailing discourses.

In conclusion, this study embraces the above conceptualisation of objects of discourse in relation to asylum seekers particularly the notion that as objects of knowledge, asylum seekers are produced, transformed and reshaped in the process of discursive formation. Deriving from Johansson (2006, p.219), as a way of defining more explicitly the notion of asylum seekers as objects of discourse, asylum seekers are conceptualised in this study in the following terms:

- a) Asylum seekers are defined in terms of being the products of different texts and different genres of discourses that have emerged in the discursive process of the co-construction of meaning within the United Kingdom. The study draws attention of the role of media discourses, parliamentary discourses as well as professional social work discourses in the construction of asylum seekers

- b) The concept of asylum seekers is treated throughout the study as context dependent. As such, the interplay between the cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural contexts is evident and an important theme throughout this study
- c) As objects of discourse, asylum seekers are also introduced from other contexts as part of an attempt to re-contextualise discourses. This results in new meanings being attained.
- d) Throughout this study, it is also evident that asylum seekers and the notion of asylum seeking as objects of discourse are transformed by different interlocutors as they adopt their own perspectives on these objects of knowledge and attempt to give an explanation, judgement, evaluation, appreciation, approbation or rejection, etc. of the object. As such, there is a highly subjective element that is inseparable from the process by which different interlocutors' representations are attached to asylum seekers and asylum seeking. This is one of main concerns for chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Lastly, asylum seekers as objects of knowledge belong to a specific social and cultural context. As such, asylum seekers as objects of knowledge are time and situation bound. As this study will demonstrate, asylum seekers as objects of knowledge constitute shared and contested knowledge within the existing discourses. This constant re-contextualisation and reconstruction of asylum seekers as objects of knowledge forms a socio-cultural inter-textuality and inter-discursivity (Fairclough, 1993).

Critique of critical discursive social psychology

Criticism of critical discursive social psychology has come from within the field of conversational analysis. This is in spite of the fact that discursive social psychology

and conversational analysis share a number of common assumptions including the following:

- i. Both are discursive approaches to understanding the social order
- ii. Both accept identity as an active, discursive and/or semiotic accomplishment that is largely maintained and transformed in interactions/conversations
- iii. Both believe that we construct and are constructed by prevailing discourses (Korobov, 2001).

The difference between the two approaches arises mainly out of the ways in which they methodologically conceptualise and orientate to these assumptions. For instance, conversation analysis and discursive social psychology invoke and make use of *contexts* in radically different ways and this is one area of contention between the two paradigms. Schegloff (1997, 1998, 1999) has criticised discursive social psychology for peddling what he characterised as a *bucket theory* of context. Schegloff (1997, 1998, 1999) argues that discursive social psychology treats *contexts* as a pre-established overarching social framework that ‘contains’ the participants’ actions and encompasses all meanings. Within conversational analysis, *contexts* are treated as locally produced and liable to change at any moment. Thus there is a slight but significant difference in the ways in which *contexts* are conceptualised within discursive psychology where *contexts* are seen as *producing* and being *produced* by the interlocutors. Within conversational analysis, *contexts* are accepted as a *project* and *product* of the interlocutor’s actions. As such, within conversational analysis *contexts* (in particular the wider societal contexts and discourses) are treated as not having a significant effect on the interlocutors’ actions. Emphasis is on the immediate local context of the utterance. Therefore, decisions regarding the consideration of context in any analysis within the conversational analysis paradigm should

... be based on what the participants observedly attend to in their interactions as being relevant context, rather than by analysts' theoretically informed assumptions about what the significant contextual features are. Hence, any use of cultural contextual particulars in analysis should adhere to the criteria of sequentiality, that is, one should demonstrate how the setting of talk affects the interactions' shape, form, trajectory, content or character (de Kok, 2008, p.887).

Thus, the main criticism that is directed at discursive social psychology in relation to the use of *contexts* is that interlocutors are turned into "cultural dopes" (Garfinkel, 1967) and are at the mercy of "abstract social forces which impose themselves" on the participants (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p.147).

Furthermore, it is also argued that placing a lot of emphasis on contextual variables carries with it the risk that the interlocutors' knowledge and rationales for their actions is side-lined, not fully acknowledged and treated as subordinate to those of the researcher's (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). Schegloff (1997, p.167) argues that this leads to a "theoretical imperialism" and the "hegemony of the intellectuals". The only way this can be avoided is by understanding interlocutors "in their own terms" and "own orientations". Thus it is argued that the focus should be on the analysis of the interpretative mechanisms and the understandings that are of particular relevance to the interlocutors and no attempt should be made to invoke some pre-formed theoretical framework in the analysis. What is suggested here would have significant implications for this study. For instance, it would be possible to invoke concepts such as 'race', 'racism', 'xenoracism' and 'power' in relations to discourses on asylum

seekers that are analysed in this study unless these are specifically referred and attended to within specific utterances being discussed.

The responses of Wetherell (1998) and Billig (1999b) to the criticisms levelled by Schegloff (1997, 1998, 1999) clarifies the methodological credibility of discursive social psychology. Billig (1999b) questions whether it is possible at all to study participants “in their own terms” and argues that any analysis that ignores the importance of the broader socio-cultural contextual factors and discourses entirely misses the point of undertaking a social analysis in the first place. Billig (1999b, p.546) characterises Schegloff’s claim to study participants’ talk “in its own terms” as a “highly sophisticated methodological and epistemological naivety” that needs re-examining. Billig (1999b, p.546) argues that the whole notion of realising ‘actual’ terms in which participants speak rests on the antiquated notion of ‘facts’ that can essentially ‘speak for themselves’. He argues that,

It is not the case ... that the conversational analyst can just sit back and observe. Like all academic disciplines, CA must be written. For this, it requires its own practices of writing. There are certain words, and phrases which let readers know that they are reading a CA text and that the author is “doing CA”. There is no doubt that CA uses highly technical vocabulary. This creates a paradox. Although participants are ostensibly to be studied ‘in their own terms’, they are not to be written in such terms. Instead, analysts use their own terms to accomplish this observation of participants’ own terms (Billig, 1999b, p.546).

Therefore, it is impossible to unpack what the participants are really saying in its purest form without *polluting* it with interpretative frames and mechanisms. As Billig (1999a, p.573) puts it “ there can be not neutral naming practice. Each practice embodies assumptions about the social world”.

Furthermore, Wetherell (1998) points out that there is an infinite amount of ‘fine details’ that can be analysed in any given set of utterances, which in itself makes the call to simply analyse the ‘actual’ interaction an oversimplified feat. In any case, how one conceptualises and characterises ‘detail’ is an ideological process that is built into the analysis itself (Wetherell, 1998). This undermines the claim by conversational analysts that they do not bring in pre-formed assumptions into the analysis of a given text. Wetherell (1998) questions the distinction that Schegloff makes between the analyst importing their own preconceptions and the points when participants are interpreted as orienting to something. It is also clear that the conversational analyst actively selects certain aspects of a conversation to highlight, and as such, actively participates the construction of that which becomes ‘relevant’.

Wetherell’s (1998) response to the criticisms coming from conversation analysts is to caution against focusing narrowly on the interactive moment. This is because there is a danger of losing sight of the fact that positions that are drawn up in a selected interactive moment are themselves representing only one of the many possible variations for reflecting the larger patterns of understanding that make possible that very interaction in the first place. She argues that Schegloff performs his own act of colonisation by proposing such a narrow view of what participants orient to. She argues that a comprehensive analysis should not be restricted to a narrow micro-

analysis of the interactive details of talk-in-sequence. Instead this should be combined with an effort to interrogate how these detailed linguistic formulations are also embedded in wider contexts which are displayed in the participants' orientations. Such an analysis of *why this here* triggers off an in-depth exploration of the *silences* and *absences* within the discourses being analysed. It is precisely for these reasons that this study uses critical discursive psychology as a methodology instead of conversational analysis.

This study is based on the premise that post structuralist theories of language and meaning-making provide a significant way of understanding human behaviour (Hall, 1997). In that respect, the study seeks to uncover the ideological working of hegemonic linguistic practices (Fairclough, 2001) which makes discursive social psychology the most appropriate methodological approach. Throughout this study language is treated as actively constructing lived lives as well as lived worlds (Wetherell et al., 2001). Discursive social psychology is employed to illuminate the significance of language within the meaning making process in relation to asylum seekers, which is embedded in wider social, political, economic and cultural context. As such, the study pays attention to the action orientation of language and its constitutive function in particular. Utilising discursive social psychology, this study identifies interpretative repertoires which frame and construct meanings relating to asylum seeking service users and how such meanings are negotiated in interactions.

Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Question

The research question that guided this study is: *How do social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets for intervention?* In line with the recommendation that “the research question must give priority to discourse, in any form, and ask about its construction in relation to its function” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.167), this study approaches the discourses about asylum seekers in *their own right* as topics of study not as mirrors of things beyond the texts e.g. attitudes and cognitive processes. Thus, the study focuses on discourses of asylum seekers as a topic for analysis. There is a concern with how meanings are produced within discourses and in particular the repertoires that people draw on as linguistic resources in order to talk about asylum seekers. As such, “the questions asked lead up to [the] study of how people, through discursive practice, create constructions of the world, groups and identities” (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002, p.119) As such, discourse is treated as a “potent, action oriented medium, not a transparent information channel” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.160) as is the tendency within traditional psychology and linguistics. Furthermore, the interest is not whether, for instance, the respondents interviewed, or politicians during parliamentary debates are revealing ‘genuine’ attitudes towards asylum seekers or whether their descriptions are accurate. Instead the concern of this study is on the accounts themselves and how they are constructed and to what effect. The central concern is how the discourse is put together, worked up and what is gained by such a construction. As such, the research question for this study is concerned with *how* asylum seekers are constructed in discourses and *what* is gained from portraying asylum seekers in a particular light. Thus of particular interest

to this study is how certain discursive devices (Edwards and Potter, 1992) are deployed in the accounts that construct asylum seekers and the defensive organisation of such accounts (Potter, 1996).

This study focuses on how asylum seekers are constructed as objects of knowledge and targets for intervention in social work discourses by utilising three sets of data:

- a) Newspaper articles
- b) parliamentary debates and
- c) Interview data from social work professionals working with asylum seekers in statutory settings

The rationale for selecting these three as research sites lies in their ability to provide significant insights into the discursive struggle over the identity of asylum seekers. They also provide a range of clearly identifiable social actors within the asylum debate. They also provide an insight into the power implications of the construction of asylum seekers in ways that enable connections to be made between the constructs and the material outcomes in particular the welfare provisions.

Furthermore, using the three sets of data provides added value to this study. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.162), “By collecting documents from many sources ... and then combining this with more directive interviewing, it is possible to build up a much fuller idea of the way participants’ linguistic practices are organized compared to one source alone”. In line with critical discursive psychology, the following questions formed the basis for interrogating these three sets of data that are used for this study:

- i. How are asylum seekers being constructed?

- ii. What are the key social effects and actions of these constructions of asylum seekers?
- iii. What are the implications of the constructs on the asylum seekers and the speakers themselves?
- iv. Are there any alternative constructions that these constructs are meant to undermine and respond to?
- v. What rhetorical devices or linguistic resources are deployed in the construct and to what effect?

Parliamentary Debates

The first data set comprises of an analysis of representations of asylum seekers in parliamentary debates. The parliamentary debates provide important insights into how, over time, specific constructs of asylum seekers have emerged and became legitimated within this specific political context. In this respect, parliamentary debates are accepted in this study as providing opportunities for a close study of the processes involved in the construction of asylum seekers. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) note the significant advantage offered by such ‘naturalistic’ records and documents is the almost complete absence of the researcher’s influence in the production of the data. Quite significantly, the use of this data enables this study to capture wide ranging perspectives on various issues relating to asylum seekers in the United Kingdom which would not have been possible to capture if, for instance, data was only collected through conducting interviews only.

An added advantage provided by parliamentary debates relating to asylum seekers is their orientation to legislation, policy and practice. The debates on asylum seekers are

performative in their intent in the sense that they are important part of the construction and development of legislation that regulates asylum seekers and welfare provisions. The debates are not just concerned with the formulation of versions of asylum seekers but also with how they should be treated. This performative orientation facilitates the exploration of the implications that specific constructs have on welfare practices.

From a practical point of view the records of the debates come already transcribed verbatim. This saved a considerable amount of time. Admittedly, the data itself lacks the finer details of an interaction such as pauses, for instance, as these are not recorded. However, as Taylor (2001) notes the amount of detail that is required in analytic data largely depends on the type of analysis that is being conducted and the questions that are being asked. Given that this study is primarily concerned with identifying patterns in discourse, their historical and social orientation, and effect rather than a micro analysis of the conversations themselves, it can be argued justifiably that the level of detail in the verbatim accounts of debates in the Hansards suffice. As such, parliamentary debates are an appropriate source of data for the purposes of this study.

In order to gain an insight into the various political arguments around the contentious issues of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, the study utilises the verbatim accounts of parliamentary debates in the Commons and Lords Hansard. According to Fletcher (2008, p.4), “these debates offer a rich record of political discourse that reveal(s) the differing ideologies of political parties”. Similarly, van Dijk (2000, p.217) sees parliamentary debates as “the site where the various ideological forces in society, in the form of political parties that represent them, are confronting each

other". As such, parliamentary debates are utilised in this study not only because they are a rich source of data but also due to their ability to offer a valuable insight into the political thinking behind the various pieces of legislation and policies relating to asylum. Furthermore, the availability in its completeness of this transcribed data of the proceedings of the Houses of Commons and Lords enables a greater understanding of the ideological basis of arguments that are advanced in their proper historical context. Analysing politicians' talk in this way also enables the analysis of discursive resources that are employed in a highly influential context. Such an approach can lead to a better understanding of the ways in which politicians disseminate, reinforce and challenge popular views of asylum seekers (Every and Augoustinos, 2007a).

The Hansard online search engine was used to locate relevant debates. Keywords were used to search for relevant debates. Broad search terms such as 'immigration', 'illegal immigration' and 'asylum seekers' were used in the first instance. Also, specific search terms were used which included; 'migration', 'immigrants', 'asylum bill', 'immigration and asylum bill', 'immigration and asylum act', 'asylum claims', 'bogus asylum seekers', 'asylum rights', 'asylum seekers' welfare', 'asylum seekers and benefits', 'asylum seekers and employment', 'asylum seekers and race/community relations' and 'asylum seekers' entitlements'. Various combinations of search words were also used to generate data. Also key dates when for instance immigration and asylum bills were passed into law were also used to search for relevant debates and then work backwards.

Although the availability of large amounts of textual data was one of the main attractions for using parliamentary debates as a research site, it also posed a key challenge in terms of data management. In order to deal with this challenge, selected texts were printed off, catalogued, and a simple database created. Categories were used to classify the texts. The categories that were used were explicitly related to the research question as focused on the constitution of asylum seekers in the debates e.g. the constitution of asylum seekers as ‘cheats’, ‘sneaky’, ‘diseased’, ‘economic burden’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘criminals’ etc.

Media Articles

The second data set comprises of media representations of asylum seekers. The rationale for utilising media representations as a research site lies in the fact that the media produces representations of the social world in terms of images, descriptions, explanations and plays a key role in providing frames for understanding the world (Hall, 1997). Media representations of asylum seekers not only portray a version of a social reality, but also “actively construct meaning ... through the active process of selection, presentation, structuring and shaping of the events” (Bailey and Harindranath, 2005, p.275). The power that the media exercises in discourse has been acknowledged within research (Fowler, 1991, van Dijk, 1991, Hay, 1996, Goodman S, 2007, Finney and Robinson, 2008). However this type of research has largely remained outside the realm of social work yet the media plays a significant role in the construction of subjectivities. The media is capable of not only constructing asylum seekers as the Other, but also in dispensing social knowledge, although it must be borne in mind that the media itself is also constrained by discourse as well. Hay (1996, p.261) aptly sums up this power that the media can exercise in constructing asylum seekers as the Other by stating that the media’s influence “does not reside in

the power of direct ideological indoctrination, but in the ability to frame the discursive context within which political subjectivities are constituted, reinforced and reconstituted. Texts are not ideological in themselves; they only become ideological in their active appropriation". Lynn and Lea (2003, p.428) have also noted that, "the media is the thread that binds the issues – the discourses – surrounding refugees and asylum seekers together." Therefore, the media plays a pivotal role in the production and construction of particular forms of knowledge relating to asylum seekers and social workers are not immune to its influence. However, it is also important to underline that the media is also constrained by discourse. The media is as arguably influential in setting political agenda as vice versa. In this light of the foregoing, the media (in the case this study newspaper articles) coverage of asylum seekers therefore provide an important research site that can closely studied in order understand the ways in which this social group is actively constructed.

The data was collected mainly from newspaper articles regarding asylum seekers that appeared in the British media in the period 1985 to 2012. As Gabrielatos and Baker (2008, p.8) These articles were generated through searching the online Nexus newspaper database. This involved the use of keywords and search criteria as in parliamentary debates. The generated articles were from the following newspapers:

- *The Sun*
- *Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror*
- *Daily Star*
- *The Guardian*
- *The Independent*
- *The Times, The Sunday Times*

- *News of the World*
- *The Daily Mail*
- *Dover Express*
- *Folkestone Express*
- *Wales Echo*
- *The Express*

As the study takes a qualitative approach in its analysis, the total number of articles received from each of the newspapers was not quantified and it was deemed that this would not be an obstacle to the realisation of objectives of this study. In any case, the study is not a quantitative account of lexical items or linguistic devices where emphasis might be on summarising patterns through counting. Instead, this study takes a qualitative approach to analysing data which is aimed at interpreting the meanings of a text in relation to the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed in discourse.

It is also important to note there is an important limitation with respect to using newspapers and the Hansard as sources of data. The sheer volume of relevant articles and debates on asylum seekers in the United Kingdom during the period under review makes any attempt at a comprehensive analysis impossible. Nonetheless, the study seeks to provide an important insight to those discourses which have a significant impact on social work professionals discourses.

Interview Data

The third set of data comprises of data collected from interviews. It is worth noting from the outset that the use of interviews in this study differs significantly from how interviews are usually utilised in mainstream social work research. Within orthodox

social work research, interviews are conducted primarily to obtain respondents' views and measure consistency. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.163), "consistency is so valued highly because it is taken as evidence of a corresponding set of actions or beliefs. If the interview talk is consistent, the argument goes, it must reflect a consistent reality beyond; consistent discourse demonstrates the interviewer has found some genuine phenomena and not biased or distorted responses". However, within discourse analysis, although consistency is still considered important it is not *essential* as it only signifies that there are regular patterns in language use within a given discourse. Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.164) argue that:

Given that the theoretical primacy of the talk itself in the discourse mode of research and the focus on how talk is constructed and what it achieves rather than whether it is an accurate description of the participant's internal state, consistency is less useful and desirable for analysis than variation in interviews. Consistency suggests that participants are drawing on a limited number of compatible discourses or interpretative repertoires when answering questions. Analyses which identify only the consistent responses are thus sometimes uninformative because they tell us little about the full range of accounting resources people use when constructing the meaning of their social world and do not so clearly reveal the function of the participants' constructions.

As such, this study attaches greater importance to evidence of variations rather than consistency that may exist in interview data that is collected. Therefore in this respect, this study departs from other forms of mainstream social work research on asylum seekers in the manner in which it considers and analyses interview data.

The context for this part of the research is a Scottish local authority that does not have a formal arrangement with the Asylum Support Service to provide services for asylum seeking service users. Most of the existing research on social care and welfare provisions for asylum seekers in Scotland tends to focus on those local authorities that have formal arrangements with NASS for the dispersal of asylum seekers. Most of the existing research on asylum seekers in Scotland tends to focus on Glasgow as a case study. For instance, Barclay and Ferguson (2002) have analysed the mental health needs of asylum seekers in Glasgow. Wren (2004, 2007) has examined local responses to the dispersal of asylum seekers to Glasgow. Coole (2002) has analysed the media depictions of asylum seekers in the aftermath of the murder of a Turkish asylum seeker in the Sighthill area of Glasgow in August 2001. Sim and Bowes (2007) have explored the experiences of asylum seekers who have been allocated housing under the government's asylum dispersal system. However, there is a need to acknowledge that asylum seekers also present themselves in other local authorities outside Glasgow which do not have formal arrangements with the Asylum Support Service for the dispersal of asylum seekers, which in itself presents its own challenges in terms of welfare provision for this service use group. This study is based on one such local authority and as such provides a context that has not been widely explored within social work research.

Ethics approval for conducting interview was granted by the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee (see appendix III). The local authority was then approached with the request to undertake the research study (see appendix V). The respondents were selected almost exclusively through making formal requests via the

local authority for practitioners willing to participate in the research study, with the exception of one or two who volunteered to participate during the time interviews were being conducted. Well before the interviews the participants were provided with copies of the Information Pack which included research proposal, participant information sheet, informed consent form, and the ethics approval form. The informed consent form was signed and returned to the researcher on the day of the interview.

A total of 25 face-to-face interviews were conducted with social work professionals who at the time of the interviews were working with asylum seeking service users. The social workers came from a variety of statutory social work teams such as child protection, looked after children, family support, housing, adult services and hospital based teams. Interviews were semi-structured and centred on the individual respondents' experiences of working with asylum seeking service users. The interviewees ranged from newly qualified to relatively experienced social workers. They also included senior practitioners, team managers and two service managers.

The interviewees were encouraged to talk about their views on asylum seeking, the roles of media and politicians in constituting knowledge about asylum seekers, their individual experiences of working with asylum seekers, what they make of existing service provisions, perceived barriers and ways of enhancing practice [see interview schedule, appendix 1]. The intention was to acquire an in-depth understanding of the social work professionals' discourses, the accounting practices and the range of linguistic resources that practitioners deployed in their accounts. Inevitably, the accounts given by interviewees varied significantly in content and form. This is also attributed partly to the fairly open ended questions that respondents were provided

with. In order to allow the participants the space to construct accounts of their own practice that are not constrained by a premeditated framework, semi structured interviews were opted for as a method of collecting data. Within the interviews the role of the researcher was largely to prompt and encourage further exploration as well as clarifying and checking out emerging issues. The rationale for using open ended questions and follow up questions was to “generate interpretative contexts in interviews” and make the interviews themselves to become “a site where the respondent’s interpretative resources are explored and engaged to the full” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.164).

It is also important to acknowledge important ethnographic issues which are relevant to this research and in particular might have had an important impact on the interviews themselves. The researcher is black and comes originally from one of the countries with the highest numbers of asylum seekers present in the United Kingdom. This is particularly significant given that all the respondents except one are white. As such, the researcher’s biography could have had an impact on the types of responses received as it is possible that the respondents could have provided different answers for instance if the interviewer was white. Hunter (2005, p.152) has discussed similar potential difficulties that can be experienced in conducting research in health and social care settings and notes that “such research potentially provokes anxiety for participants, particularly if they are members of the dominant social group within racialised and gendered social relations”. In the case of this research study, one way of negotiating these barriers was to explain the purpose of the study. What also possibly went a long way towards ameliorating the situation was the fact that the study does not have as its objective the evaluation of social work practice which tends

to emphasise and focus on strengths and weaknesses in respondents' practice. The study does not seek to provide a direct critique of social work professionals' everyday skills and competences; for example it does not seek to measure the extent to which the social work professionals are culturally sensitive to asylum seeking services or make recommendations in that regard. As such, the fact that the study is an exploration of how language is used in the construction of a service user group made it easier for participants to open up about their practice. The researcher also explained to the respondents that he is also a qualified and practising social worker. This sameness or commonality was acknowledged by both the researcher and the participants, but at other times during the interviews the researcher was positioned as "the same" when in fact the researcher clearly saw a "difference". It is also important to emphasise that although ethnographic issues might to some extent have had an impact on the responses in interviews, the methodology of discourse analysis used for this study does not seek to uncover a pre-existing 'reality' or 'truth' about the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed. Instead, the focus is on how the selected discourses provided in the interviews are put together, worked up and legitimated.

The interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Given that the approach adopted for this study is one that views an interview as a conversational encounter rather than a research instrument to reveal objectively a set of beliefs or opinions, in transcribing the recorded interviews the researcher's questions were considered as equally important as the respondent's answers. This is in line with Potter and Wetherell's (1987, p.165) recommendation that as the researcher's questions set some of the functional contexts for the answers, they must be included in the final transcript:

In practice this means that the linguistic nuance of the question is as important as the linguistic nuance of the answers. The *whole* interview must be transcribed, rather than just the interviewee's part. Unlike traditional interviews, the researcher's questions are seen as active and constructive and not passive and neutral.

As the primary interest of the study is how linguistic resources are deployed in the construction of asylum seekers, a full transcription of all words spoken including hesitations was undertaken. However, finer details such as in-breaths, out-breaths, overlaps, pause lengths and changes in intonation were omitted from the transcripts as it was considered that they would not add any particular value to the objectives of this study. As such the full Jefferson (1985, 2004) style of transcription is not used in this study. In order to ensure authenticity and quality of the data collected through interviews, the transcripts were shared with the respondents with a view to correcting any errors in transcription.

The transcripts were examined initially using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis, Nvivo 8 (Richards, 1999, Bazeley and Richards, 2000). Admittedly, Nvivo 8 is very much amenable to the use of a grounded theoretical approach to data analysis (Bringer et al., 2006, Hutchinson et al., 2010). However, at this preliminary stage of qualitative data analysis, the use of Nvivo 8 was mainly useful for the purposes of organising respondents' accounts through coding the data, but in the process of doing this it helped in unearthing and collating discursive themes and issues of interest that recurred across and within accounts. This also became the first step of an analytic procedure to turn the "unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.167). Features of interest particularly recurring words, phrases,

metaphors, and arguments were noted as well those that resonated and bore resemblance with depictions of asylum seekers in media and parliamentary discourses. These themes and issues of interest became the subject of a much more detailed rigorous analysis using the discursive social psychology approach to reveal *how* asylum seekers are constructed in various discourses, the *purpose* and *function* of such constructs. The process of analysis itself follows two closely related activities that Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.168) identify; searching for a pattern in the data; and an interest in function and result which “consists of forming a hypothesis about these functions and effects and searching for linguistic evidence”.

Interpretative Repertoires

This study uses discursive social psychology to achieve two main tasks:

- i. The identification of the general linguistic resources that are used to construct discourse and how these resources enable the performance of actions. This is a recognition of the fact that “people perform actions of different kinds through their language and their writing, and they accomplish the nature of these actions partly through constructing their discourse out of a range of styles, linguistic resources and rhetorical devices” (Potter and Wetherell, 1994, p.48). For this study this imperative involves identifying the specific interpretative repertoires that are employed by social work professionals to construct asylum seeking service users.
- ii. The identification of the detailed procedures, through which these representations of asylum seekers are constructed, made to look factual and plausible.

Therefore, the first task is apposite for the purposes of this study as it will enable a better understanding of asylum seekers as a social and political construct through the identification of the various interpretative repertoires within the discourses relating to asylum seekers. Interpretative repertoires are an integral part of the methods that people use to make sense of the world that they live in. Interpretative repertoires also serve as a discursive resource that can be identified in accounts. Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.128) have defined interpretative repertoires as “a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterise and evaluate actions and events.” According to Edley (2001, p.198), interpretative repertoires serve as

... the building blocks of conversation, a range of linguistic resources that can be drawn upon and utilised in the course of everyday social interaction. Interpretative repertoires are part and parcel of the community's common sense, providing a basis for shared social understanding. They can usefully be thought of as books in the shelves of a public library, permanently available for public borrowing.

As such, they are the “recurrently used terms for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.149). They provide ways of talking about any object of knowledge and events in the world. In the case of this study, interpretative repertoires provide ways of taking about asylum seekers. According to Reynolds and Wetherell (2003, p.5):

Interpretative repertoires are the recognisable routines of arguments, descriptions and evaluations found in people's talk often distinguished by familiar clichés, anecdotes and tropes. They are the building blocks through which people develop accounts and

versions of significant events and through which they perform social life. Interpretative repertoires consist of ‘what everyone knows’ about a topic. Indeed the collectively shared social consensus behind a repertoire is often so established and familiar that only a fragment of the argumentative chain needs to be formulated in talk to form an adequate basis for the participants to jointly recognize the version of the world that is developing.

When considering interpretative repertoires, the issue of variability is important. According to Reynolds and Wetherell (2003), people tend not to use only one repertoire but many interpretative repertoires which they activate in different situations. This is because discourse is never static. As such, interpretative repertoires are accepted in this study as performing different sorts of accounting tasks depending on the context in which they are deployed. According to Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.156), “because people go through a kaleidoscope of situations, they will draw upon different repertoires to suit the needs at hand”. This is why as noted above Edley (2001) likens interpretative repertoires to books in a public library that can be borrowed when needed. However, there is an absence of an unlimited freedom of choice in terms of which repertoires are available for use. This is because the available interpretative repertoires are limited by the culturally available resources (Juhila, 2009). For this study, the cultural resources that have an influence on the available interpretative repertoires are the media representations of asylum seekers, the parliamentary debates and the data collected from the interviews conducted for this study with social work professionals who work with asylum seekers. The interpretative repertoires are identified in this study through closely reading and re-reading a number of times the media representations of asylum seeking, the

parliamentary debates and the data collected through interviews until as Edley (2001, p.198-199) suggests

... one begins to feel as though you've heard it all before. People seem to be taking similar lines or making the arguments as other previously interviewed ... Gradually one begins to recognise patterns across different people's talk, particular images, metaphors and figures of speech.

Furthermore, as Reynolds and Wetherell (2003), note that the concept of position is an important consideration in the analysis of interpretative repertoires. This is because the interpretative repertoires that are identified in this study provide access to specific speaking and acting positions which carry with them specific roles and rights. For instance, each interpretative repertoire that is identified within the interview data creates a specific subject position for the respondent and establishes a particular kind of relationship between the respondent and his/her asylum seeking service users. Therefore within the context of this study, subject position is accepted as referring to "... "locations" within conversations" (Edley, 2001, p.210) where individuals are reconstituted as subjects in relation to relevant ways of speaking about asylum seekers. Within the paradigm of critical discursive social psychology these subject positions are understood as deriving from social and historical resources and are highly occasioned instances in response to prevailing discourses (Wetherell, 1998). As Edley (2001) notes, people are both *produced* by and are also *producers* of subject positions. Thus, although subject positions are understood to constitute individuals within a structure of rights and obligations (Burr, 1995), the process itself is essentially an occasioned social practice (Wetherell, 1998). One of the central concerns of this study, especially chapters 5, 6 and 7, is the examination of the ways

in which asylum seekers are positioned in the various discourses, the rights and obligations that emanate from the assumed subject positions, and the concomitant responses to asylum seekers that these subject positions entail.

Linguistic Strategies

In addition to identifying and analysing interpretative repertoires, this study is also concerned with the analysis of the various linguistic strategies that are employed in the construction of asylum seekers as well as how these devices help in explaining and justifying social work practice with this service user group. Rhetorical devices are linguistic tools that are used in the construction of arguments to make them comprehensible to the target audience. It is also assumed that the audience may not necessarily share the same views as those expressed using the device but they can ‘hear’ the speaker because they share a common ground on knowledge of the linguistic tools (Tilbury, 1998). There are a number of rhetorical devices that are drawn upon in the selected UK parliamentary debates, media depictions of asylum seekers, and in the interviews that are conducted for this study. These rhetorical devices are used to present the given accounts as “the truth”, to persuade, as well as to manage the speaker’s identity. Tilbury (1998, p.297-298) identifies examples of rhetorical devices some of which are present in the three data sets that are used in this study; and these include:

- i. Emphasising the similarity between the speaker and audience as a way of appealing to the listener that they in fact both share the same experience
- ii. Disclaimers, tentativeness and hedging; this strategy is illustrated in Chapter 5 to be an important one in the manner in which politicians in particular frame their constructions of asylum seekers in parliament. It is also a strategy that

social work professionals interviewed for this study also deploy as will be illustrated in Chapters 6 and 7.

- iii. Personal experience as proof of one's view; this is a strategy that is widely used by social work professionals interviewed for this study as will be illustrated in chapters 6 and 7
- iv. Revealing the thought process that leads one to a particular conclusion and point of view
- v. Emotional displays
- vi. Exemplification; showing something very clearly by way of examples e.g. the ways in which social work professionals interviewed make reference to specific cases of asylum seeking service users as a way of illustrating their arguments.
- vii. Appeal to the *facts*
- viii. Presenting one's position as the reasonable middle ground
- ix. Claiming special knowledge
- x. Credentialing
- xi. Dichotomising
- xii. Inversion i.e. the reversal of the usual or expected order; in the case of this study for instance the claim that asylum seekers receive preferential treatment and because of that have it better than *our own*
- xiii. Deflections
- xiv. Direct criticisms of others; this strategy is evident in the apportioning of blame that is discussed in Chapter 7
- xv. Naming tactics
- xvi. Overstatements, repetition and emphasis

- xvii. Rhetorical questions
- xviii. Proverbs, clichés
- xix. Couching one's view as the majority opinion
- xx. Conceding a general principle to deny a specific instance

In the case of Tilbury's (1998) research, these rhetorical devices were used to maintain and legitimate the status quo i.e. the inequalities between white New Zealanders and Maoris but are also of particular relevance to this study as will be demonstrated.

Discussion

Much has been written about the utility of positivist paradigms in social work research (Smith, 1987, Sheldon, 1984, Sheldon, 1986, Raynor, 1984, Jordan, 1978). A positivist approach is particularly problematic in the evaluation of social work research that uses critical discursive psychology as a methodology. For instance, within critical discursive psychology the positivist concerns with objectivity, reliability, replicability, and generalizability are not accepted as of particular significance. The idea that research should closely capture the 'real world' or 'truth' is problematic given that the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin critical discursive psychology maintain that the world is discursively constructed (Hardy and Phillips, 2002). As such it is accepted that there are many versions 'reality' and 'truths'. Therefore, the constructivist method of interpretation of data used in critical discursive psychology problematizes some traditional approaches in qualitative analysis. This is especially the case around the issues of *reliability* and *validity*. While the positivist paradigms are concerned with the removal of researcher bias in favour of empiricism and objectivity, within post-modern approaches such as critical discursive psychology, the notion of an unbiased researcher is seen as

unachievable and treated in its own right as a “discourse of science through which a particular version ... of human life is constructed” (Burr, 1995, p.160). Baker (2006) and Burr (1995) argue that objectivity is impossible to realise given that people tend to experience the world differently as well as interpret differently. As such, even that which is deemed objective within positivist paradigms still constitutes a stance. Therefore, within discourse analysis, there is an imperative for researchers to recognise and acknowledge their particular involvement in the research process and reflect on the role it plays in the results that are produced. Thus, within this study there is an acknowledgement of the possible impact of the researcher’s ethnicity and biography on the research process and how this required a high level of reflexivity and self-awareness to reduce the possible imposition of the research own positions and biases. The perspectives of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) were particularly helpful in ensuring that the research process for this study was rigorous. For instance, the study pays particular attention to the following elements:

- i. *Solidness* – the study uses a range of textual features in analysing and negotiating the interpretative voice
- ii. *Coherence* – the study pays particular attention to the extent and success of the analysis in creating a coherent narrative out of the interpretation of the data
- iii. *Comprehensiveness* – there is also awareness that the study in its analysis of the discourses relating asylum seekers should answer the research questions as well account for any conflicting textual features.
- iv. *Fruitfulness* – this process involves a focus on the explanatory potential of the analytical frameworks used in this study including their ability to provide new explanations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987)

- v. *Triangulation* – within mainstream qualitative studies, triangulation is undertaken as part of an attempt to ensure validity. In this study triangulation of data was particularly helpful in making sense of the relationship between the texts; the inter-discursive relationship between texts, genres, and discourse relating to asylum seekers; the social level (context of situation); and the broader social, political and historical contexts (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). Constantly switching between these various levels during the analysis as well evaluating the findings of this study from these perspectives ensured that the research process is both robust and rigorous.

However, as already noted, within discourse analysis it is neither possible to achieve objectivity nor is it its stated objective. Due to its acceptance of multiple ‘truths’ and ‘realities’, discourse analysis is more orientated towards relativism than positivism. As this chapter clearly demonstrates, the fact that discourse analysis is oriented towards relativism should not be taken as constituting a lack of rigorousness in the research design and process in which anything goes.

Chapter 4 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the history of immigration and asylum seeking in the United Kingdom. It also reviews the public's and government's responses to these phenomena. The rationale for this chapter is that it provides a historical and social context for the ensuing analysis of the ways professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets for intervention. Providing such a context in this study of professional discourses is necessary because according to Thompson (1984) it enables "an interpretation of the position of a story, account or version of events within a field of power relations" (cited in Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p.105). As a result of this necessity Thompson has suggested a scheme for analysis involving the following three stages:

... first, the social scientist must describe the social field, history and social relations relevant to the area of investigation; then engage in some systematic linguistic analysis of the pattern of the discourse; and finally in an interpretative or hermeneutic act connect the latter with the former. This final moment of analysis is vital, Thompson argues if we are to argue confidently that certain forms of discourse are implicated in the sustenance and maintenance of particular social patterns (cited in Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p.105).

Potter and Wetherell (1992, p.105) see Thompson's scheme for analysis as useful as it provides a "context or backcloth" for the analysis. Therefore, this chapter provides

resources that allow links to be made between discursive patterns and social consequences.

However, by using history in this way, there is also an awareness within this study that versions of history or as Wetherell and Potter (1992, p.105) put it the “ ‘what happened,’ the social context ‘surrounding discourse’”, can never be presented in a simplistic and neutral form. As such, the historical and social context provided in this chapter should not be regarded as separate from but rather as an integral part of the whole interpretative process of this study. This is in line with Wetherell and Potter’s view that:

... if one assumes that discourse and social context are entirely interpenetrated, then the practical analysis of ideology can never be a tidy procedure. We prefer to see as a case of multiple resources, where a range of accounts and versions of events are used to make sense of other accounts and versions of events in order to develop an argument and to make a case about some body of material (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p.105).

Furthermore, this chapter represents a version of events upon which this study anchors its argument that British immigration and asylum policies are permeated by xenoracism. The study argues that the policies regulating the asylum system are intrinsically racist and oppressive yet social work has to operate within these policies. The social and historical context provided in this chapter therefore serves to clarify and make explicit this fundamental assumption. The immigration and asylum policies

are thus presented as part of an on-going process that goes as far back as the beginning of the 20th century.

Asylum seekers are defined as persons seeking protection under the United Nations Convention on Refugees after entering a country on a temporary visa or without any documents. Article 1(A) (2) of the Convention, as amended by the 1967 New York Protocol provides the following definition of a refugee as a person:

... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 2010b, p.14).

The term refugee is widely used to describe displaced people all over the world. In a legal context in the United Kingdom, a person is described as a refugee only after the Home Office has accepted their claim. Section 94(1) of the Immigration and Asylum Act (1999) defines an asylum seeker as follows: "... "asylum seeker" means a person who is not under 18 and has made a claim for asylum which has been recorded by the Secretary of State but which has not been determined". In other words, an asylum seeker is someone who has lodged a formal application for asylum/protection in the UK, and is awaiting a decision. This study will focus on how asylum seekers are constructed by professionals as subjects of knowledge and targets for intervention during this period when their applications for protection are under consideration. This

is mainly because once a person has been granted refugee status or Discretionary Leave to Remain under humanitarian grounds; they automatically assume the same rights as British citizens.

Officially British asylum policy is aimed at fulfilling the country's international law obligations by ensuring that the "UK should have a humanitarian asylum process which honours our obligations to those genuinely fleeing persecution while deterring those who have no right to asylum from travelling here"(Home Office, 2002). As a signatory of the 1951 United Nations Convention on the status of Refugees, article 33(1) of the convention commits the United Kingdom to the principle of *non foulement*; that is it cannot "expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2010b, p.30).

A Political Economy of British Immigration

As a phenomenon, immigration in modern Britain is multifaceted. The motivations for immigration and the opted immigration pathways (e.g. immigrating as an asylum seekers, student, or skilled worker) are highly varied and dynamic. A political economy perspective helps to develop a better understanding of the broader social, economic, and political processes that are associated with this phenomenon. A study of immigration also affords an important insight into the interaction between the state and the economy, and this section considers three associated areas. First, an important issue in the political economy of immigration is the issue of citizenship. This chapter will demonstrate that since the beginning of the 20th Century the issue of citizenship has been at the centre of debates on immigration and asylum. Number of studies

(Hansen, 2000, Joppke, 1999, Joppke, 2000, McLaren and Johnson, 2007, McGhee, 2009, Tyler, 2010) demonstrate a strong correlation between citizenship and the development of British immigration policies. Freeman (1978, cited in Joppke, 2000, p.100) states that it is possible to “interpret much of post war immigration policy in Britain as an attempt to remove the rights of citizenship too generously extended during the colonial period”. Thus, it is quite tempting to conclude that immigration in the Britain can be reduced to issues of citizenship in the light of these debates. However, such a conclusion would be historically inaccurate. This is because the impetus for post war immigration and the development of British immigration policy has been a result of demographic and economic concerns in as much as concerns around the issue of citizenship have played a role. Nonetheless, it is also clear that the issue of citizenship has emerged as a key vehicle through which the immigration debates have been articulated.

The second key issue in the political economy of immigration is labour. Arguably this has been a principal concern in the development of immigration policy especially in the immediate post war period. Studies by Favell (2009), Castles and Kosack (2010), George et al. (2012) have noted the demands of the British economy as a key driver of British immigration policy despite the rhetoric about ‘fortress’ Britain and the ‘dangers’ of immigration. It is also important to note that although Britain actively encouraged labour migration during the post war economic boom period, the negative attitudes towards immigrants did not change, as this chapter will demonstrate. In fact throughout the history of British immigration policy, the notion that foreign workers are recruited to boost labour supply in periods of economic growth or to perform jobs shunned by citizen workers is very clear. However, unlike in the Middle East for

instance, foreign workers have also increasingly acquired rights under the constitution including citizenship and are not entirely treated as expendable commodities.

The third issue in the political economy of British immigration is humanitarianism. A significant proportion of the immigrant population has been allowed to enter and remain in the United Kingdom on the basis of family ties (family reunion), a right guaranteed under article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (Somerville and Sumption, 2009). A significant number of immigrants are refugees who have been afforded protection from persecution in their countries of origin. As will be illustrated, the humanitarianism issue did not dominate political debates until the mid-1980's when the numbers of people claiming asylum began to increase substantially. By that time labour immigration from the Commonwealth on a large scale had been curtailed. As the numbers immigrants claiming asylum began to increase, the focus of the debate changed from Commonwealth immigration to the political and economic dimensions of asylum seeking. It is debatable whether the upsurge in the numbers of immigrants claiming asylum was the result of political upheavals around the world (e.g. Sri Lanka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, Rwanda, etc.) or this was an attempt by immigrants to find new avenues of migration in the light of the demise of Commonwealth labour migration. However, what is clear is that immigration in the modern era is multifaceted and the United Kingdom has attempted to regulate it through creating categories of immigrants (skilled workers, unskilled workers, family members, asylum seekers, students, seasonal workers, etc.) each of which requires a special policy to regulate it. Clearly immigration is affected by both domestic and international politics. However, a detailed analysis of the weight that should be given to each of the push and pull factors is beyond the scope of this study.

British immigration policy before 1979

Before looking at British asylum policy there is a need to outline the development of British immigration policy in general. This is important because in many ways immigration policies influenced and indeed set the tone for asylum policy. It was not until the early twentieth century that Britain had a developed immigration policy even though the Poor Laws regulated internal movements. Since then, as the study will show, the development of immigration policy had been dominated by three main themes. First, there is a consistent tendency to construct immigrants as inherently problematic – ‘outsiders’, a ‘danger’, and a ‘plague.’ Secondly, immigrants are perceived in terms of the burden they would impose on public finances especially the welfare system. Thirdly, the demands of the British economy have also been quite influential in shaping immigration policy.

It should be noted that well before the first piece of legislation was passed specifically to deal with immigration, the notion of immigrants as the ‘outsider’, a ‘danger’ and a ‘plague’ was an established way of constructing immigrants within official circles and parliamentary discourses. For instance, on 1 April 1901, the Conservative Party MP for Sheffield Central, Howard Vincent asked if the Secretary of State for the Home Department has looked into:

...into the effect of alien immigration in the East End of London, and to the report made by their Commissioners to the effect that considerable areas in St. George's-in-the-East and other adjacent districts are being denuded of Gentile population, the properties sold, and the old tenants replaced by immigrants paying abnormally high rents, and defraying the expense by taking in an improper

number of lodgers (Howard Vincent, Hansard, Vol: 92, Col: 347-348, 1 April 1901).

This negative perception of immigrants was also echoed in the 1903 Royal Commission's report which characterised 'aliens' or immigrants as "impoverished, destitute, deficient in cleanliness, liable to introduce infectious diseases, criminals, anarchists, prostitutes, caused overcrowding, and raised rents" (cited in, Hayes, 2002, p.31). Therefore, immigrants were constructed in discourses prevailing at the time as socially deviant and a threat to the British ways of life. Thus the *race vs. nation* discourse anchored in the *us/them* bifurcation was very much evident and was indeed to be drawn upon to justify subsequent restrictive legislation with negative exclusionary outcomes. In fact, as this study will demonstrate this *us/them* dichotomy continues to frame discourses related to immigration and asylum and is one of the main salient and enduring features of xenoracism.

These negative perceptions and exclusionary tendencies towards immigrants can clearly be conveyed through the analysis of the parliamentary debates prior to the enactment of the first ever British immigration law, the 1905 Aliens Act. The law was passed specifically aimed at setting up barriers to the entry of Jews who were fleeing persecution in Germany, Russia and Poland as well as the general increase in the levels of immigration. Within these parliamentary debates that ensued, immigrants were portrayed in a negative light. The following, rather long, extract from the then Secretary of State for the Home Department, Akers-Douglas instance, when introducing the bill to parliament, is very important in conveying an accurate picture and sense of the perceptions and attitudes that existed at the time:

... there is a certain class of *undesirable aliens* who are not so welcome, and whose repatriation is very desirable. The number of aliens in this country, as shown by the census returns, has enormously increased in the last twenty years. In 1881 there were more than 135,000; in 1891, upwards of 219,000; and in 1901, nearly 287,000, or an increase in that period of something less than 152,000. I will remind the House that these figures do not really represent the number of the *foreign element* in this country, because all those who have been born to these aliens in this country are, of course, not included in these figures. Unfortunately, these aliens have a tendency to occupy very few centres in this country, and therefore *their presence creates great difficulty in certain districts*. Between a fourth and a fifth of the whole of the foreign population in this country are residing in four or five centres. The last return shows that, excluding *the large families which many of them have*, something like 54,000 are residents in the borough of Stepney. There are other boroughs in London where large numbers have also taken up their habitation; and by their residence in these districts they have not only *displaced a large amount of labour, but have also occupied a very large number of dwellings from which they have driven the bonâ fide inhabitants*. ...Not only have these aliens living in these districts caused a great deal of *overcrowding*, with all its evils, and a *displacement of British labour*, but I am sorry to say, from the information which has reached me at the Home Office, that the feeling which exists between these settlements of foreigners in

London and the native population is becoming very strained, and is really *a very serious menace* to the maintenance of law and order in these districts. *This evil*, I am sorry to say, is not likely to diminish; and, indeed, it is increasing. The immigration has increased very largely in recent years. ...Another point which I would ask the House very seriously to consider is that the class of aliens which we get here *is not the class of aliens which at all makes the best citizens*. It is the class excluded by the United States, and therefore it is fair to say that we only get *the refuse* ... (emphasis added; Aker-Douglas, House of Commons Hansard, 29 March 1904, Vol: 132, Col: 987 - 995)

The importance of the above extract from Aker-Douglas' speech lies not only in its explicitly xenoracist depiction of immigrants but also in the fact that the type of reasoning and justification for calls for restrictive immigration policies that are given here have been built upon and further elaborated (and possibly sanitized and presented in much more subtle form) in contemporary discourses and in particular parliamentary discourses as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. Some of the xenoracist notions that have shaped immigration policy are highlighted in the above extract by way of italics. In fact the notions that are expressed here by Aker-Douglas of immigrants – as undesirable Others; presenting difficulties to the host nation; having unnecessarily large families which put a strain on public resources; benefiting at the expense of the British citizens; a menace and socially deviant which makes them incapable of fully integrating into the British society to become bona fide citizens – continue to be present in contemporary discourses relating to immigration in general and asylum seekers in particular.

The result was an act which promulgated the power to prevent the landing of undesirable immigrants in the United Kingdom. The prevailing perceptions, attitudes, and exclusionary tendencies towards immigrants were evident within this piece of legislation. For instance, according to Section 3 of the Act an immigrant was considered undesirable:

- i. If he cannot show that he is possession of or is in a position to obtain the means of decently supporting himself and his dependants (if any);
or
- ii. If he is a lunatic or an idiot, or owing to any disease or infirmity appears likely to become a charge upon the rates or otherwise detriment to the public; or
- iii. If he has been sentenced in a foreign country with which there is an extradition treaty; not being an offence of a political character, which is, as respects that country crime within the meaning of the Extradition Act 1870; or
- iv. If an expulsion order under this Act has been made in his case.

As Cohen (1996) and Hayes (2002) argue, these determinations became the forerunners to the ways in which immigration rules are invoked to prevent immigrants from entering the United Kingdom particularly those perceived as requiring recourse to public funds. In fact, the law made provision for the deportation of immigrants found to be in receipt of parochial relief within their first year of arrival. As Hayes (2002, p.36) notes it becomes clear “how in the initial operation of the first piece of legislation to control aliens, access to public money remains key, both at the point of entry and internally” and this remains a key consideration in immigration and asylum

policies as will be illustrated. As such, the Act provided ways of not only managing immigrants at the point of entry but also provided a system of internal controls for those immigrants allowed to enter and remain in the United Kingdom.

As already noted, the immigrants were perceived as predominantly undesirable as the then Secretary of the Home Department, Aker-Douglas clearly states in the extract above. As such, can justifiably argue that the rationale and underpinning ideology for a restrictive immigration regime was based on the purported need to maintain and improve the British nation and its stock (Cohen, 1996, Hayes, 2002). In fact the influence of Social Darwinism was also explicit in the Act. There was the underlying belief that ‘non-Britons’ came low in the pecking order of ‘races.’ Jews were, therefore, perceived as a major threat of alien dilution of English blood. It is in this respect that British immigration policy can be argued to be based on racist philosophies. Jews were defined in the following terms: “the real enemy, the invader from the east, the ruffian, the oriental parasite” (Hayes, 2002, p.32). These views, centred on a need to safeguard “Britishness”, led to the emergence of a discourse of nation and nationhood upon which current immigration and asylum policies are based.

The post-World War II period saw a slight change in policy as there was a deliberate and concerted attempt to encourage immigration from the Caribbean and the Asian sub-continent. The change in direction of immigration policy was necessitated by the severe post war labour shortages that bedevilled the British economy, which was experiencing a boom. It should however be stressed that this change in the direction of immigration policy was not followed by changes in attitudes and perceptions of immigrants. Racist attitudes and perceptions of the outsider remained essentially the

same. Concerns regarding what were perceived as the deleterious effects of immigration of Black people on the 'racial character of the English people' were voiced as early as 1948. Carter, Harris and Joshi (1987) have noted in their study of the racialization of black immigration that two days after the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* a letter was sent to the then Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, by 11 Labour MP's calling for the control of Black immigration, since: "An influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned." The *Empire Windrush* arrived on 22 June 1948 carrying 492 Caribbean immigrants. In fact the call for a more restrictive immigration policy increased especially in the aftermath of the Notting Hill disturbances in September 1958. For instance, Louth MP, Cyril Osborne, argued that Britain was faced with "the urgent need for a restriction upon immigration into this country, particularly of coloured immigrants" (House of Commons Hansard, 29 October 1958, vol: 594, col: 195) and in December 1958 he forwarded a motion in parliament in which he urged "Her Majesty's government to restrict the immigration of all people ... who are unfit, idle or criminal" (House of Commons Hansard, 5 December 1958, vol: 596, col: 1552); common descriptors for black people at the time.

In fact, once the economy began to shrink in the 1960's culminating in the 1970's economic recession, the debates about the 'problem' of immigration became prominent and dominated media and parliamentary discourses. On 23 February 1960, Frank Tomney, MP for Hammersmith North, in his contribution towards the debate on the 1958 Notting Hill disturbances, described the magnitude of what he perceived

as the 'problem' of immigration and its negative impact on British society and race relations as evidenced by the disturbances:

On 5th December, 1958 I gave figures, which I will read again, which illustrate the size of the problem of the number of foreign nationals within our borders. In the debate on immigration control, I said: My researches show that prior to the war, there were 240,000 aliens in Great Britain. After the war, we had the European voluntary workers scheme by which 57,000 men and 30,000 women entered the country. Then we had the 110,000 Poles from General Anders' army, and in addition, students, prisoners of war and miscellaneous groups who accounted for another 10,000. Whereas, in 1931, we had 268,000 people of foreign birthplaces, in 1958 we had an estimated 800,000 and this does not take account of the coloured population which has been coming in in recent years. This does not take into account the influx of Commonwealth nationals which now total, I am told, about 240,000. This situation gives rise to housing difficulties. I am investigating every one of these cases as they affect my constituency. In every case there has been trouble either between white landlord and coloured tenants or vice versa. In these circumstances, among people who have been reared in working-class districts, one gets a slow simmering to boiling point extending over two years, finally erupting in the mob violence ... (Frank Tomney, House of Commons Hansard, 23 February 1960, Vol:618, Col: 332-333).

Therefore, the post Second World War period saw what was articulated as an additional ‘problem’ associated with the *influx* from the Commonwealth. Immigrants were portrayed as threatening race relations within the British society. Indeed as will be demonstrated, this argument continues to be used in call to restrict the levels of immigration in contemporary discourses as the next chapter illustrates. Whilst in opposition throughout the 1950’s and during the time when the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill was being debated in parliament, the Labour Party opposed call to restrict immigration arguing that such calls were based on racism. For instance, Labour MP for Smethwick, Gordon Walker, in his contribution in the debate on the proposed legislation argued that the Conservative Home Secretary had been

... revealed before us in his nakedness. He is an advocate now of a Bill which contains bare-faced, open race discrimination. He advocates a Bill into which race discrimination is now written—not only into its spirit and its practice, but into its very letter (Gordon Walker, House of Commons Hansard 16 November 1961, vol 649, Col: 706).

These calls on for a reduction in the levels of immigration culminated in the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962). However, in spite of this legislation calls for a further curtailment of the levels of immigration continued.

It is also important to underline the fact that in spite of its consistent opposition to immigration controls and the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill in particular during the period when Labour Party was in opposition, it was doubtful that a Labour Government would repeal the existing legislation. According to Sivanandan (1982, p.12) once the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) had been passed, “the Labour

Party with its eye to the elections had begun to sidle out of its commitment". In late 1963, the Labour Party accepted the necessity of immigration controls. This signalled the beginning of the emergence of a consensus between the Labour and Conservative parties on this issue. Thereafter, increasingly within Labour circles, there emerged the tendency to depict immigration as a problem. For instance, in 1965 Baroness Asquith of Yanbury described the 'problem' of immigration as a "flood" that had all along been "pouring in before the General Election when the previous Government were in power ... Yet that flood was apparently neither detected nor corrected" (House of Commons Hansard, 10 March 1965, Vol: 264, Col: 78). In his contribution on the debate on the Commonwealth Immigrants Bill, the Labour MP for Springbrook, Birmingham, Roy Hattersely, explained the change in his political views on immigration as follows; "I now believe that there are social as well as economic arguments and I believe that unrestricted immigration can only produce additional problems, additional suffering and additional hardship unless some kind of limitation is imposed and continued" and he also conceded that with the benefit of hindsight the Labour Party whilst in opposition "were wrong to oppose that Act" (House of Commons Hansard, 23 March 1965, Vol: 709, Col: 380). Therefore, what emerged clearly in the Labour Party's parliamentary discourse on immigration was the notion of the undesirability of Commonwealth immigration. This was accounted for in terms of the perceived problems associated with immigration especially community integration and race relations.

Furthermore, when a Labour Government came into power in 1964, the new government also came under increasing pressure from extreme right members of the Conservative Party particularly MPs from the Midlands region. One such member

was the Smethwick MP, Peter Griffiths, who was extremely anti-immigration and had successfully campaigned against Labour candidate Gordon Walker in the 1964 elections on the slogan 'if you want a nigger for a neighbour vote Labour'. The Conservative Party supported a new bill sponsored by Louth MP, Cyril Osborne, which aimed at denying entry to immigrants from the Commonwealth with the exception of those with parents born in the United Kingdom. Although the bill was thrown out of parliament, within a few months the Labour Government introduced a White Paper aimed at amending the 1962 Act. The proposed amendments went a long way in placating the calls from the extreme right Conservatives. The primary objective of the White Paper was that:

... there must be a reduction in the rate at which vouchers are issued to enable Commonwealth citizens to come here for employment and, as from to-day, the rate will be reduced from 20,800 a year to 8,500 a year... Applications will continue to be entertained under Category B of the scheme for persons with certain special qualifications or skills, though on a more restricted basis than in the past. The remainder of the vouchers will be available under Category A; that is, for workers who, whatever their qualifications have specific jobs to come to, subject to a limitation of 15 per cent on the share of those to be issued to any one Commonwealth country. No vouchers have been issued since September, 1964, to applicants in Category C, that is to say, the category for persons who wish to work here but do not qualify under Categories A or B, and it has now been decided that no further vouchers will be issued

to applicants in this category (The Earl of Longford, House of Commons Hansard, 02 August 1965 vol: 269 col: 23-24).

The outcome was the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1965), which had the effect of further curtailing immigration from Commonwealth countries.

During the rest of the 1960's, the debates focused on the presence of black people from the Commonwealth. Within this discourse, imageries were employed that evoked links with disease, crime, and costs to the nation. It is within that context that Cyril Osbourne, MP for Louth, requested the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs to call on Commonwealth countries to "reduce the flow of migrants into Great Britain, in order to prevent a demand for their total exclusion until such time as the social problems created by those already here have been solved" (House of Commons, Hansard, 2 July 1968, Vol: 767, Col: 1280).

Anti-immigration campaigns by Conservatives such as Wolverhampton South West MP, Enoch Powell, continued. Attention in the parliamentary debates turned to the increasing number of Kenyan Asian immigrants who held British passports and as such were exempt from the provisions of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1965). As British citizens there were free to enter and remain in the United Kingdom without any restrictions. The government reacted to the growing political pressure by introducing the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1968) which withdrew the automatic right of entry into the United Kingdom of Kenyan Asians. For the first time a distinction was made between citizens who were patrials i.e. those who possessed identifiable ancestors in the British Isles, and those who did not. What also became clear was that those who were identified as patrials were exclusively white.

The concept of patriality was included in the Immigration Act (1971). This law set up parameters for any claim to British nationality. Under section 2 of the Act, a person has the right of abode in the United Kingdom if:

- i. He is a citizen of the United Kingdom or Colonies and that citizenship is on the basis of birth, adoption, naturalisation or registration in United Kingdom
- ii. He is born as a citizen of the United Kingdom or Colonies born to or legally adopted by a British parent at the time of birth or adoption. The parent's citizenship was also supposed to be based on birth, adoption or naturalization
- iii. He is a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies who has any time been settled in the United Kingdom and had at that time been ordinarily resident there for a period of five years or more; or
- iv. He is a Commonwealth citizen born to or legally adopted by a British parent who at the time of the birth or adoption had citizenship of the United Kingdom on the basis of birth in the United Kingdom

This was followed by the British Nationality Act (1981), which effectively removed the automatic right to British citizenship through birth in the United Kingdom and linked citizenship to right of entry. According to Humphries (2004c, p.97), "A myth that has underpinned immigration from the start, of the British nation comprising a distinct race of people of common origin and descent, white and European, was again written in the 1981 Act." In the light of the parameters set by these successive pieces of legislation, it can be argued that the legislations amounted to racial discrimination through immigration controls as British nationality was explicitly linked to birth and by default a specific race. The effects of these changes to British nationality laws were *inter alia* to restrict the eligibility of those immigrants who managed to enter and

remain in the United Kingdom. The strict eligibility criteria also denied citizenship some of those who were born in the United Kingdom. In view of the provisions of these Acts, it can also be argued that the provisions clearly favoured white Commonwealth citizens over blacks in the determination of eligibility for British citizenship. On that basis these provisions can be characterised as racist.

By 1981 immigration en-masse from the New Commonwealth had come to an end. Immigration for settlement had also been systematically severely curtailed. It is in view of the underlying notions of nationalism and chauvinism that Humphries (2004c) has characterised British immigration policies as inherently racist. Research by Anderson (1983), Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989), and Miles (1993) has demonstrated that immigration laws depend on the distinction between ‘native’ and ‘foreigner,’ ‘citizen’ and ‘alien,’ ‘us’ and ‘them,’ and ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ (cited in Humphries, 2004c, p.97). Indeed, these distinctions based on the *us/them* bifurcation are very much evident in both Labour Party and Conservative Party parliamentary discourse on immigration as demonstrated. As a result of the manner (xeno-racist) in which immigration policy has evolved over time, what has become entrenched is the tendency to perceive an immigrant as the foreigner, the outsider, the *Other*, and “a seething mass of refuse and filth” (Gerrad, 1971, cited in Humphries, 2004c, p.98). Closely linked to this is the perceived urgent need to protect the small British island by closing off borders. These salient features were indeed instrumental and assumed prominence in the evolution of British asylum policy, and are of particular relevance to social work practice with asylum seekers.

British asylum policy under the Conservatives 1979 – 1996

The asylum issue only took centre stage in political debates from the mid-1980s. Prior to this, as already noted, the race question dominated concerns surrounding immigration as the focus was on the immigration of black people from the Caribbean and the Commonwealth. The issue of the arrival at the time of what were for the most part European asylum seekers in the post war period was pushed in the background. However, the 1980's saw a major shift in terms of the race of asylum seekers. The decade witnessed a significant increase in the numbers of asylum seekers who were considered, in generic terms, as black people. Arrivals of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka (Tamils), Africa and other parts of the Third World began to increase substantially. In Britain, the number of asylum seekers rose slowly initially from 1 563 in 1979 to 4,811 in 1986 and 5,100 in 1988. However, in 1989 the numbers went up threefold to 15,500 (Kaye, 1994a). Due to the fact that asylum seekers were becoming more "visible" in terms of race and skin colour, hostility among the British public began to rise. As a result, the asylum topic took centre stage in media and political debates paving the way for restrictive legislation specifically to deal with what was perceived as the problem of asylum seekers.

Up until the early 1990's the successive Conservative governments reacted to what they portrayed as the increasing threats of mass inflows of refugees into the United Kingdom. According to Cohen (1994), the British government's typical response has been to introduce visa requirements in response to outbreaks of conflict. For instance, in 1985 visa requirements were introduced for Sri Lankan nationals. This was in response to the significant rise in the number of asylum applications from Tamils. This was the first time visa restrictions were placed on Commonwealth nationals (Kaye, 1994b). This policy of restricting entry was further reinforced by section 1 of

the 1987 Carriers Liability Act, which imposed heavy fines of £1000 per person on all carriers found guilty of transporting people who do not possess sufficient and appropriate documentation. According to Cohen (1994), the effect of this piece of legislation was that it extended the immigration service to employees of airlines and shipping companies because the onus was on them to detect anyone travelling with false documents.

The impact of visa requirements on asylum seekers can be best understood and felt when viewed in conjunction with the Carriers Liability Act. As Morris (1998) notes, a request for asylum is not a valid reason for granting a visa, and asylum requests can only be made from the territory of the host country. Therefore, asylum seekers are most likely to face difficulties obtaining a temporary visa to travel to the United Kingdom in order to claim asylum. Without a visa they cannot enter the United Kingdom legally. According to Ruff (1989, p.481) this piece of legislation “undermines the substantive right of refugees to claim asylum and allows the United Kingdom effectively to restrict or evade its international obligations”. The fact that there is no specific visa for asylum seekers led some members of the judiciary, in the case of *R v Secretary of State for Home Department exp Yassine [1990]*, to concede that the 1987 Act combined with visa restrictions “might pose substantial obstacles in the path of refugees wishing to come to this country” (cited in Stevens, 1998, p.208).

More importantly, there is also an assumption that most asylum seekers did not meet the conditions of refugee status as they were “clearly arriving to better themselves” as stated in the 1991 Conservative Party’s Campaign Guide (cited in Kaye, 1994a, p. 150) and as such were considered as economic migrants. As the perceived threat

grew the distinction between refugees and immigrants became blurred within the Conservative's language especially in the media. The Conservative's portrayal of asylum seekers in this way was meant to have the effect of rendering more acceptable to the public, the government's stringent measures to control the increasing numbers of people seeking asylum.

Legislation that was passed to govern the system of asylum clearly was therefore not inspired by the need to protect and uphold the human rights of the persecuted that are seeking refuge. Instead, it was clearly a question of addressing numbers and the need to appear as a "strong" government imposing "strong" controls to guard against the possibility of the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers who are portrayed as abusing the system in a bid to avoid immigration controls. The increasing numbers of asylum seekers arriving at the end of the 1980's placed the issue of asylum high on the policy agenda. Table 1 below shows how the numbers increased in 1989, 1990 and 1991 and it was in this context that proposals were introduced for the first piece of legislation dealing specifically with the issue of asylum.

<i>Table 1 - Asylum Applications, 1988 – 1999</i>		
Year	Number	% Change from Previous Year
1988	3998	-6
1989	11640	+191
1990	26205	+125
1991	44840	+71
1992	24605	-45
1993	22370	-9
1994	32830	+47
1995	43965	+34
1996	29640	-33
1997	32500	+10
1998	46010	+42

Source: (Bloch, 2000)

The political debates surrounding the first ever piece of legislation proposed to deal specifically with asylum, the 1991 Asylum Bill, clearly demonstrate this point. The then Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker argued that the Asylum Bill would reform the treatment of asylum seekers and speed up the procedures for the determination of their claims and he believed that “the rapid rejection of a large number of unfounded claims and the early departure of those applicants from this country will play a major part in deterring further abuse of the process” thereby allowing the government to deal effectively with what he saw as the ever growing numbers of asylum applications (House of Commons Hansard, 2 July 1991, vol: 194, col. 166-1667). The Home Secretary’s view is of critical importance here as it projects the core belief that the majority of asylum seekers are in fact ‘bogus’ claimants. Michael Shersby, MP for Uxbridge, drew the attention of parliament to the fact that “many bogus asylum seekers are coming to Britain as part of a carefully planned racket” (House of Commons Hansard, 2 July 1991, vol: 194, col: 173). It is this belief that has been the foundation for much of the subsequent pieces of legislation. The Home Secretary also voiced his concern about how Britain would be “swamped” unless there was a concerted effort to curb immigration into Britain and Europe as a whole.

By this time there were broad areas of consensus that were beginning to emerge between the main political parties. For instance, parliamentary debates are replete with acknowledgements by Labour and the Conservatives of the United Kingdom’s obligations under the Geneva Convention. Both parties also shared the view that this obligation was unequivocally towards “genuine” asylum seekers as opposed to the predominantly “bogus” claimants who were presenting themselves in United

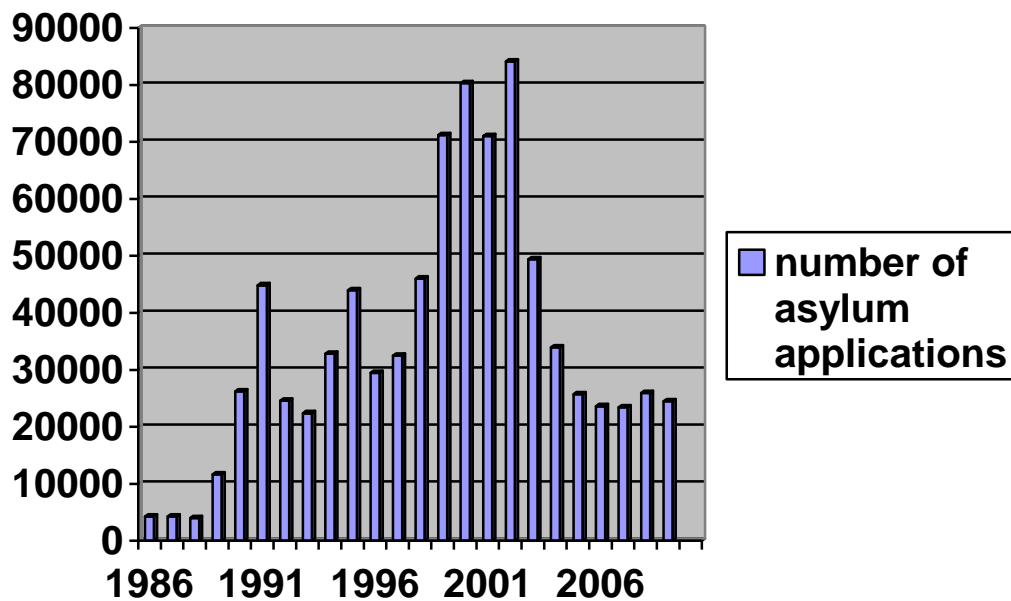
Kingdom. As a consequence both parties actively participated in the discourse of disbelief which shaped asylum policies. In fact, this view that most of the asylum seekers were not genuine was also shared by the Labour Party although the overall party's position was to oppose the bill and cast it as essentially a racist piece of legislation. For instance, according to Claire Short, MP for Ladywood Birmingham, it was her "experience that there has been a growth in bogus applications in recent years" (House of Commons Hansard, 2 July 1991, vol: 194, col. 172).

However, the legislation ran into problems in parliament due in part to the opposition of the Labour Party. It should be noted that the Labour party itself was ready to strike a deal with the Conservatives on the legislation. In fact it was the alliance of various human rights NGOs, churches and legal establishment that successfully campaigned against the bill. The legislation was eventually dropped and replaced by Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill in 1992. What emerges clearly from the whole debate surrounding the bill is that it rarely centred on issues specifically related to the unique status of refugees and asylum seekers. The need to safeguard and promote their rights is conspicuous by its absence. There is no mention of a resettlement plan for refugees. Instead the emphasis was on *detering* people from seeking refuge in the UK. Of particular concern to social work is the fact that since the early 1990's, as will be demonstrated, "a main plank of deterrence has been a progressive dismantling of social rights for all asylum seekers, removing them from the usual provisions of citizenship" (Cemlyn and Briskman, 2003, p.165). This process is firmly based on the long standing historical relationship between immigration control and access to welfare provision.

The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act (1993) was enacted as part of a raft of measure aimed at curbing the growing number of asylum applications. Although it granted an in-country right of appeal against negative decisions to asylum seekers, this was only limited to 48 hours. This contrasts sharply with the ten-day period that is given to standard immigration cases. The law included an extension of the Carriers Liability Act (1987) through requiring airline companies to demand transit visas to ensure that transit passengers did not disembark in the UK and claim asylum. The law also introduced compulsory fingerprinting of all asylum seekers. The statutory obligations of local authorities to provide social housing for asylum seekers were severely curtailed. This clause signified the beginning of the onslaught on asylum seekers' entitlement to mainstream welfare services.

The 1993 Act had an almost immediate statistical impact. Six months before the Act was passed, of the 13 335 decisions made by the Home Office, 86 per cent were granted either asylum or Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR) and only 14 per cent were refused. Six months after enactment, only 28 per cent were granted either asylum or ELR and 72 per cent were rejected (Stevens, 1998). These figures were indicative of the shift in policy towards an emphasis on deterrence and disseminating the message that United Kingdom was not a 'soft touch' for asylum seekers. However this legislation was largely unsuccessful as the numbers of asylum applications continued to increase substantially, as shown in the bar graph below (Figure 1), resulting in the need for even tougher legislation.

Figure 1: Asylum Applications



(Adapted from Groat, R. and McGuinness F. (2010), *Asylum Statistics*, London, House of Commons; Heath T, Jeffries R. and Pearce S.(2006), *Asylum statistics 2005*, London; and Home Office (2000), *Statistical Bulletin*, London, Research and Statistics Directorate)

As a result of the concerns regarding the effectiveness of the 1993 Act, KPMG Peat Marwick (KPMG) was commissioned to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the asylum appeals procedures under the act and to make recommendations on practices and procedures. KPMG recommended that:

The Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department may ... need to consider more radical options for dealing with the backlog of asylum applications, such as removing the right to an oral hearing in without foundation cases, increasing the scope for paper determination for all types of appeal, and to publish a "white list" of

countries deemed not to put asylum seekers at risk (KPMG Peat Marwick, 1994).

The report went on to recommend more visa restrictions and the need for both primary and secondary legislation which would further restrict the numbers of asylum seekers entering the country.

In 1996 the government passed the Asylum and Immigration Act. The then Home Secretary, Michael Howard, justified the act by linking immigration with welfare provision and employment opportunities. He argued that the “asylum procedures are increasingly abused ... The present benefit rules are an open invitation to persons from abroad to make unfounded asylum claims” and “the fact that those people can get jobs quite easily – at the expense of those who are entitled to live and work here – is one of the main reasons why the United Kingdom is such an attractive destination to asylum seekers” (House of Commons Hansard, 20 November 1995, Vol: 267, Col: 336-337). This provided the rationale for the move towards a closer link between benefit regulation and immigration status. According to Morris (1998, p.951) this development should also be seen as a “key tactic in the development of internal controls, both as a basis for interagency cooperation and the means by which service providers can be encouraged to police migration”. Thereon, immigration status became a key reference point in the manner in which authorities related to immigrants and asylum seekers in particular. Access to mainstream welfare provision *inter alia* became subject to one’s immigration status.

Consequently, the legislation reduced asylum seekers’ entitlement to welfare. It created two categories of entitlement. Asylum seekers who had applied for asylum at

the port of entry were to be eligible for 90 per cent of the social security benefit income support. Those who had applied in-country or were appealing against negative decisions were to be excluded from benefits but certain provisions were made for in-kind support from local authorities. Furthermore, asylum seekers were not allowed to apply for a work permit until they had been resident for at least six months, which meant that they had neither full access to social security benefits nor the legal entitlement to work. Employers caught hiring asylum seekers were liable to a penalty fine under the Act.

The Act, therefore, represented a major onslaught on asylum seekers' social citizenship rights. The overall impact of the Act was the exclusion of asylum seekers from citizenship resulting in the creation of a society in which there are institutionalised inequalities among people within the same country. Thus the UK society consists of "citizens" who also include convention refugees and those with ELR on the one hand, and "xenos" who are mainly asylum seekers who have minimal rights. Even these minimal rights that "xenos" possess are not guaranteed and are constantly eroded by the successive governments concerned with boosting their public profile rather honouring their obligations under international law.

British asylum policy under New Labour

When Labour came to power in 1997 hopes of an asylum policy driven by a quest for social justice rather than self-serving political interests were soon dashed. It became apparent that the asylum policy of the Labour government was not different from that of the Conservatives. The government published the White Paper, *Fairer, Faster and Firmer – A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum* (Home Office, 1998), which was a consultation document that formed the basis for the 1999 Immigration

and Asylum Act. It advocated for “fair, fast and firm immigration controls” (Home Office, 1998), which was very reminiscent of the previous Home Secretary, Michael Howard’s speech three years earlier. Howard had argued for “firm but fair” immigrations controls (House of Commons Hansard, 20 November 1995, Vol: 267, Col: 335). Therefore, it is no surprise that the 1999 Act builds on Conservative Policies in the areas of pre-entry controls and welfare support for asylum seekers. The only difference between the two governments was the extent they went in disenfranchising asylum seekers. The fact that Labour made a policy U-turn on immigration and asylum was picked on by Conservative MP, Anne Widdecombe in her contribution to the proposal to further restrict employment of asylum seekers under section 8 of the 1996 Act which Labour had previously vehemently opposed:

I am intrigued. I should like to know why, from a position which was clear when the Conservative Government introduced that measure; to a position that was apparently equally clear immediately after the election when the Minister was responsible for these matters; to now when we come before the House, the hon. Gentleman has decided that section 8 is a good thing. I am delighted. I welcome any sinner who repenteth (House of Commons Hansard, 16 June 1999, Vol:333, Col: 484).

In fact, whilst in power the Labour government indeed went further than the Conservatives in further restricting asylum. The Carriers Liability Act 1987 was further extended to incorporate trucking companies and train passenger services like the Eurostar. The reason for this according to Home Secretary Jack Straw was “to reduce the large numbers of undocumented passengers using this route” (House of

Commons Hansard, 8 April, 1998, Vol: 310, Col: 255). Ironically, while in opposition, the Labour party had also argued against pre-entry controls saying they could prevent genuine asylum seekers from leaving the country where they were being persecuted. However, once in power, if they had had their way the Labour Government would have completely taken asylum seekers out of the social security system and cash economy by introducing a cashless system based on food vouchers only redeemable at designated supermarkets. It was only due to the threats of rebellion from some Labour back benchers that Jack Straw was forced to introduce a cash component of £10 in order to ensure that the Bill got through its third reading (Bloch, 2000). Under the revised legislation, support for asylum seekers was to be administered by a new organisation called the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and adults and children were to be given £10 in cash and their remaining benefits in food vouchers. Under this legislation, the total value of the social security benefit income support was equivalent to 70 per cent of the social security benefit income support received by eligible British citizens. Additional in-kind support in the form of furniture and the payment of utility bills increased the value of the package to 90 per cent of the prevailing value of income support. Alan Simpson, a Labour MP, captured the overall impact of the reduced income support when he said that:

We in this House need to remind ourselves that income support levels were calculated and defined as financial survival levels – the breadline. How can we say to people that they have to feed their children while living at 70 per cent or 90 per cent of the breadline level, and do it legitimately? (cited in, Bloch, 2000, p.40).

Furthermore, those who were opposed to the new support system pointed out that the cost of implementing the voucher system would be far more expensive than providing

the traditional cash benefits. Labour's counter argument was that money would be saved in the long term as the system was going to act as a deterrent (Bloch, 2000). The policy succeeded in stigmatising, degrading, and humiliating asylum seekers leading to their total exclusion from society in line with government's ultimate objective of making seeking asylum as unattractive as possible to potential applicants.

The Act also introduced new policies. It introduced the compulsory dispersal of asylum seekers in an attempt to relieve the burden of provision from London (Home Office, 1998). The act also aimed at cutting the backlog of 52,000 cases by reducing the number of appeals to one. Asylum seekers who had been waiting for more than five years for their cases to be heard were to be granted indefinite leave to remain while those who had waited for 3 – 5 years were to be given four years' leave to remain. It is also important to draw attention to Regulation 20 of the Asylum Support Regulations 2000, established under the Immigration and Nationality Act 1999, which severely curtailed asylum seekers' freedom of movement (Cohen, 2002). According to the regulation, asylum seekers and their dependents in NASS accommodation could not leave their accommodation for a period that is more than seven consecutive days and nights and the total number of absence should not be more than 14 days and nights in any six months period without the approval of NASS. Asylum seekers were to be subject to unannounced visits from NASS and immigration officials. The police were also to keep weekly updates of asylum seekers in the area including personal details of the principal applicant and number of dependents. Asylum seekers could also be required to report to designated police stations at stated time periods. The designated police stations were often far from where asylum seekers lived resulting in asylum seekers walking over long distances to report as their support is largely in kind

as illustrated. Cohen (2002) has described the NASS scheme and the dispersal system as the creation of modern Poor Law and has likened control of asylum seekers under Labour Government to a form of surveillance.

The picture that emerged from the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act was that the Labour Government was committed to continuing with the dual strategy of their Conservative predecessors of restricting entry to the UK and reducing social citizenship rights for asylum seekers. The failure of the Act to deal effectively with the growing number of applications (see figure 1) meant that the Labour Government had to introduce even more stringent entry requirements and tougher legislation. For instance, social services have been drawn in increasingly as part of the government's attempts to get a grip on the asylum system. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 continued with the policies of the 1999 Act and went further by drawing the entire state machinery into the surveillance process. Local Authorities are under an obligation to furnish at the request of the Home Office information of any resident in their area suspected of unlawful presence in the UK. Local Authorities were also obliged to report failed asylum seekers who tried to claim community care provision (Humphries, 2004c) and this inevitably committed social services to be inquisitors of immigration status and reporters to the Home Office (Cohen, 2003).

Section 55 of the Act further restricted available support by allowing the state to deny any support in the form of housing and state benefits to asylum seekers who have lodged their applications more than 72 hours after arrival. Voluntary organisations such as the Refugee Council and Shelter have documented the destitution that has resulted from this policy (Refugee Council, 2004b, Dwyer and Brown, 2008). Section

4 of the 2002 Act provides support to asylum seekers whose applications have been declined but have hit times. However, this support is on condition that the asylum seekers undertake to return to their respective countries of origin when called upon. Section 4 support is set at a much lower rate of income support. Income support for citizens is set at £57.45 per week; section 95 under the 2002 Act support for eligible asylum seekers is £44.22 per week and section 4 support set at £35.00 per week (House of Lords/House of Commons Committee on Human Rights, 2007). In his evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights on 20 November 2006, Richard Dunstan, Policy Officer with the Citizens Bureau, stated that, section 4 support

... may be manageable for a short period of time ... which was the original intention but for long periods that leaves individuals in particular unable to purchase replacement clothing. Over a period of time, clothing wears out. They may start off with appropriate clothing if they arrive in summer and are on section 4 support, by the time winter comes they may not have a winter coat. On that level of support, particularly where support is provided in vouchers ... they cannot buy clothes at all, it makes it extremely difficult” (House of Lords/House of Commons Committee on Human Rights, 2007, Q54).

This inadequacy of section 4 support also needs to be understood within the context of the huge backlog the government has to contend with when it comes to deporting asylum seekers whose claims have been rejected. As a result what in principle is supposed to be short-term support in reality is long-term support. This effectively sentences asylum seekers on section 4 support to a life of abject poverty especially

given that they are not entitled to other forms of state support that can ameliorate their conditions.

Most recently, the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 has given the local authorities the green light to terminate basic support from families unsuccessful in their application for asylum. The act has also given the state the power to attach a condition of ‘community activity’ to hard case support. The law makes it a criminal offence for a person to possess “without reasonable excuse” an invalid document showing his/her identity and nationality when first interviewed by an immigration officer upon entering the country. It gave the immigration officer the power to arrest the individual. The Refugee Council has raised concern that this measure could penalise asylum seekers who arrive “without travel or identity documents in effect punishing refugees for behaving like refugees” (Refugee Council, 2004a, p.3).

In 2006, the government introduced the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act. The aim of the Act was to reform the immigration and asylum systems. As part of the reform process, the government established the New Asylum Model (NAM) in April 2007 to make the process of making and determining a claim quicker. With the new model, the Home Office aims to make a decision on any claim within one month of a claim being made. In the event of a claim being refused, the Home Office aims to conclude the appeal process including the removal of the claimant within a five month period. Each asylum case is allocated to a specific case owner who is responsible for the case from the beginning to the end. The case owner is responsible for meeting the claimant within four days of a claim being made, setting reporting conditions, making a decision on the application, and conducting an appeal on behalf of the Home Office,

including representing at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal. A claim can be lodged at any one of the NAM centres in Glasgow, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Solihull, Central London and West London. However, NAM does not deal with the historically huge backlog of asylum cases which are currently dealt with as ‘Legacy Cases’.

In addition to the restrictive and discriminatory legislation, one can also argue that the government in a way has ‘rigged’ the asylum system to ensure the failure of as many applicants as possible. A significant proportion of asylum applications fail simply because of poor or non-existent legal representation, not because their cases are unfounded. With no legal representation and often speaking little or no English, many asylum seekers stand no chance at all. Most asylum seekers depend on legal aid. At the same time, there has been a marked decline in the number of competent legal aid solicitors. This is mainly due to the fact that the government has over the years cut the amount of legal aid available for asylum cases. These cuts meant that asylum seekers are increasingly finding it difficult to access good quality representation (Robins, 2011). For instance, two of the United Kingdom’s largest immigration advice charities, the Refugee and Migrant Justice (RMJ) and the Immigration Advisory Service (IAS) collapsed in 2010 and July 2011 respectively. The Immigration Advisory Service attributed its decision to enter into administration to the £350 million cuts that are being made to the legal aid system (Medley, 2011). Solicitors have pointed out that it is impossible to do a decent job representing asylum seekers with such low levels of funding. The hours paid to solicitors by legal aid for preparing asylum cases are too simply insufficient to cover all aspects of work required to put together a robust appeal. Such work would normally include corroborating affidavit

statements, expert reports, medical evidence of torture and trauma as well as legal research work. As a result most legal aid funded cases are inadequately prepared and are generally unattractive to experienced and reputable solicitors. This also leaves the asylum seekers open to exploitation by unscrupulous and incompetent solicitors who see asylum seekers essentially as ‘cash cows’. They take the money and present half-baked submissions on behalf of their clients resulting in high levels of rejections and failure of claims.

In spite of the fact that it prides itself in its so-called policies of race equality, the last Labour government was also actively pursuing a series of negative and reactionary administrative measures designed solely to keep certain races out. This distinction is embodied in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. While the Act extends anti-discriminatory legislation into the public sector, the immigration service is outside its remit. In the light of this exemption Hugo Young, a journalist, has characterised the Act as “The bluntest piece of state sponsored ethnic discrimination in 35 years” (Young, 2001). In fact, when presenting the Race Relations Bill to the House of Lords, Lord Bassam justified the exemptions on the grounds that, “The operation of immigration necessarily and legitimately entails discrimination on the basis of their nationality” (*Lords Hansard*, 20 October 1999, Col. 1268). This leaves people who are subject to immigration control susceptible to various forms of discrimination as clearly demonstrated by the experiences of asylum seekers. This is why Cohen (2002, p. 539) has argued that, “immigration controls represent institutionalised racism in the clearest sense.” Institutional racism was defined in the McPherson Report as:

... the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting thoughtlessness and stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (McPherson, 1999, paragraph 6.34).

This apparent lack of interest in promoting and safeguarding the rights of asylum seekers has resulted in the marginalisation of asylum seekers. This has manifested itself in destitution, racist attacks (e.g. in Dover in 1999 and North East England in 2002), and the general criminalisation and demonization of asylum seekers as bogus, illegal immigrants, and scroungers. In fact, in 2001 eleven human rights organisations compiled a report in which they complained that “politicians were encouraging racist hostility in their public attitudes towards asylum seekers” (*The Observer*, 1 July 2001).

It is also important to emphasise that asylum seekers are not invariably passive victims of the system. For instance, asylum seekers have joined campaign groups such as groups such as Amnesty International, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, various chapters of the Asylum Seekers’ Support Network, and Refugee Council among others. However, Van Dijk (1996) found that immigrants have passive access to discourse. Asylum seekers are often talked about as subjects or topics of discourse by other social actors such as non-governmental organisations and pressure groups. As such, as a social group, asylum seekers have minimal access to the discourse and as a result their voices are not heard as they are not heard. Certainly a number of stories have appeared in the media in which asylum seekers have protested against the

treatment they have received from the British governments. Such forms of protest include asylum seekers who have gone on hunger strike and sewn their eyes and mouths (The Bristol Post, 25 July, 2012; Frith, 2012) and the extreme cases include asylum seekers who have attempted suicide (Steenbergen, 2012, Masocha, 2008). However, in terms of impact asylum seekers' voices and actions have very little influence in the formulation and direction of asylum and immigration policies.

Discussion

This chapter has highlighted the nature of immigration and asylum policies in the United Kingdom and has demonstrated that these policies are by nature underpinned by xenoracism. What is also clear in this chapter is that there is an emerging consensus on asylum and immigration across the political divide. The post-Thatcher era has seen the main political parties gravitating towards a broad consensus on immigration issues. According to Smith (2008, p.416), "immigration has essentially become a valence issue rather than a position issue: the main parties agree on the broad policy parameters and compete only on the detail of policy and implementation." For instance, Favell (1998) demonstrates that while the Conservatives may have portrayed themselves as 'strong' on immigration, the reality is that mainstream political parties' policies have been similar in practice save for the rhetoric. As a result of the emerging consensus on immigration and the need to appear 'tough', a very restrictive legislative framework has been established and social workers not only have to work within it but at times have to enforce it. For instance, it has been noted how the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 imposes an obligation on Local Authorities to furnish at the behest of the Home Office information of residents in their area suspected of unlawful presence in the UK. Local Authorities are obliged to report failed asylum seekers who try to claim community

care provision (Humphries, 2004c). This legislation has effectively committed social services to be inquisitors of immigration status and reporters to the Home Office (Cohen, 2002). According to Humphries (2004c, p.95), this has happened “because they [social workers] are imbued with an individualistic and unpoliticised view of ‘values’ concerned with being non-discriminatory, anti-racist and anti-oppressive, they can persuade themselves that ‘anti-oppressive’ means what they say it means.”

The tendency is for social workers to convince themselves that they are acting in an anti-discriminatory way and take comfort in that. This ‘unacceptable practice’ (Humphries, 2004c) will continue unless social workers build in a critical tradition to their practice which will enable them to deconstruct how asylum seekers are portrayed at different levels in society. As such, anti oppressive and anti-racist perspectives on their own are inadequate in fostering a critical tradition to social work practice. Anti oppressive and anti-racist perspectives tend to focus on the client-social worker relationship and the inherent power dynamics. Although, there is an acknowledgement of the impacts of the wider economic and socio-political contexts on the client-social worker relationship, the anti-oppressive and anti-racist perspectives do not go beyond that in their analysis. For instance, they do not focus on the actual ways in which the social policies that regulate the client - social worker relationship are constructed and rendered acceptable. As a result, there is a need for a perspective that looks critically into the specific ways in which these social policies are constructed by particular attention to language use. This study seeks to fill this gap in existing social work research.

Chapter 5 CONSTRUCTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN MEDIA AND PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSES

This chapter provides an insight into the various ways in which asylum seekers are portrayed in two significant areas: the media and parliamentary discourses. This will serve to make explicit how the marginalisation of asylum seekers and their subsequent exclusion from the mainstream welfare apparatus and wider society have been legitimated and normalised. The rationale for this chapter is to provide an appreciation of a wider context within which the construction of asylum seekers by social work professionals can be understood. This is because the media and parliamentary discourses make up part of the wider frames of reference that social work professionals draw on, in addition to their specific professional discourses, in their attempts to engage meaningfully and make sense of asylum seeking service users.

What emerges clearly from the discussion of asylum policies and references that have so far been made on how they are depicted in the media is that asylum seekers are a problematic out-group. This marginalisation of asylum seekers is achieved through a process characterised by Riggins (1997) as rhetorical Othering. This process involves the stigmatisation of asylum seekers as a targeted social group as they are perceived as subversive, dangerous and in particular illegitimate. This portrayal of asylum seekers as an out-group is accomplished through the use of the oppositional binary *us v them*, which is characterised by the positive portrayal of groups and individuals who are subsumed under the first person plural pronouns *us* and *we*; and the simultaneous marginalisation of those groups and people that are designated as *they* and *them*. According to Baker (2006, p.16) “such oppositions are typical of ideologies in that

they create an inherent need to judge one side of the dichotomy as primary and the other as secondary, rather than thinking that neither can exist without the other". Within that context, positive attributes of those designated as *us/we* are also juxtaposed or contrasted with those classified as *they/them*. Coe et al (2004) have argued that discourses that consistently deploy binaries privilege one over the other. In the case of discourses relating to asylum seekers, once the 'two' sides have been constructed; they are treated unequally especially given the evaluative nature of the discourse. As part of that process of establishing these binaries "the social construction of evil is necessary for the construction of good" (Achugar, 2004, p.317). Within the discourses relating to asylum seekers, this takes the shape of those in the *we/us* in-group being constructed in a positive light whilst *them* or the Others out-group are constructed in a negative light. However, the dividing line between the oppositional binaries is one that is discursively drawn and redrawn as the ideas of *sameness* and *difference* as well as claims to ownership (*ours/theirs*) and group membership (*us/them*) are staked out and contested. Fowler (1991) examines the ways in which language structures encode an ideological viewpoint and the ways in which the media acts in perpetuating unequal power relations through these linguistic structures:

In the Press, this ideology is the source of the 'consensual "we" ' pronoun which is used often in editorials that claim to speak for 'the people'. How 'we' are supposed to behave is exemplified by the regular news reports of stories which illustrate such qualities as fortitude, patriotism, sentiment, industry. But although consensus sounds like a liberal, humane and generous theory of social action and attitudes, in practice it breeds divisive and alienating attitudes, a

dichotomous vision of 'us' and 'them'. In order to place a fence around 'us', the popular papers of the Right are obsessed with stories which cast 'them' in a bad light: trades unionists, socialist council leaders, teachers, blacks, social workers, rapists, homosexuals, etc., all become stigmatized 'groups', and are then somehow all lumped together and cast beyond the pale (Fowler, 1991, p.16).

The binaries that are established through using personal subjective pronouns are used to construct in-groups and out-groups. This also applies to the ways in which asylum seekers are portrayed in media and parliamentary discourses. In the case of portrayal of asylum seekers in media discourses, the use of inclusive pronouns *we/us* in addition to denoting an out-group simultaneously distances the reader/listener from *them*.

The use of the oppositional binary *us/them* is also important in framing the discourse of nations and nationhood which is a crucial component in the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed in media and parliamentary discourses. A recurring theme through this chapter is how the construction of asylum seekers in media and parliamentary discourses is framed as constituting a national crisis or a national invasion which has the potential to destabilise, undermine or threaten the British communities and their ways of life. Lynn and Lea (2003) have noted how in the United Kingdom, the notion of asylum seekers as presenting a national crisis tends to take centre stage of national debates during elections and in parliamentary debates. Hier and Greenberg (2002) have also reported similar trends in Canada. Billig (1995) analyses of the deployment and effect of discourses of nation and nationhood in the speeches of US President Bush in the run up to the first Gulf War. This analysis is

particularly informative and relevant to this study as it demonstrates the significance of invoking the discourse of nation and nationhood as a linguistic strategy. According to Billig (1995), President Bush worked up the discourses of nation and nationhood in his construction of the war to portray the war as a perfectly legitimate and necessary defence of US *national* values; and the protection and defence of another *nation's* sovereignty, i.e. Kuwait. He argues that this linguistic strategy was largely responsible for the huge popularity that the decision to go to war then enjoyed as evidenced by the increase in Bush's public opinion poll ratings and the increases in the sales of patriotic memorabilia; thereby demonstrating "the speed with which the Western public can be mobilised for flag-waving warfare in the name of nationhood" (Billig, 1995, p.2).

According to Billig (1995) the idea of a nation has become a common sense notion that permeates through all aspects of daily life and everyday talk. He argues for instance that the idea of a nation is implicit in the use of pronouns such as *we* and *our*; e.g. 'our' Prime Minister, 'our' sovereignty, and 'our' country. This everyday 'banal' nationalism (Billig, 1995) which characterises everyday talk has become so entrenched and normalised in western societies to the extent that they have become invisible and unnoticeable. According to Billig (1995) it is on these ideological foundations of banal nationalism that the legitimating power of invoking the nation as a discursive resource can be revealed. Therefore, Billig (1995, p.7) argues that, "The popular reaction of support for the Gulf War in the United States cannot be understood by what happened in the moments of crisis. A banal, but far from benign, influence must have been routinely accomplished to make such readiness possible". Therefore, this banality cannot be mistaken for being benign or harmless as it is hegemonic and caters to those within the *us* in-group (Sonwalker, 2005). The

existence of these banal forms of nationalism serve to normalise as a given the importance of the nation, nation state and nationhood and these notions become of particular significance when worked up in discourses. They become of particular significance when invoked in the ways in which asylum seekers are constructed as this study will illustrate.

It is important to note that the *us/them* bifurcation is central to the notion of nationhood. As Nag (2001) notes:

Nations have always been concerned about 'us' as against 'them'.

Nations are obsessed with 'self' and discriminate 'the other'. The construction of the national self has always been only vis-à-vis 'the other'. The basis of such construction is differentiation. The 'self' consisted of people who share common cultural characteristics and such commonalities could be measured by contrasting against those who do not. Thus construction of nationhood is a narcissistic practice while nation building is all about walls around the 'self' and distancing from 'the other' (cited in Sonwalker, 2005).

Therefore, the notion of nationhood is central in bringing together and mobilising people as a collective group and also distinguishing those who do not fall within the boundaries of the collective group. As such, one's national identity can be articulated as a basis for differentiating between who belongs and who is an 'outsider'. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) note how one's national identity can play an important role in the manner in which as the Other they are responded to. They argue that the responses to the Other can be worked up in terms of the ways in which the Other is perceived to impact on the nation; "If they enhance the national interest they are embraced; if they

threaten the national interest they are to be rejected” (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001, p.77). This is a recurrent and important theme in discourses relating to asylum which are discussed in this study as various interlocutors tend to frame their views this way as will be made apparent in this chapter.

Construction of asylum seekers in media discourses

Figure 2: Media depictions of asylum seekers



Some sections of the British media have assumed a leading role in conveying and fostering negative perceptions of asylum seekers. According to Okitikpi and Amyer

(2003, p.216), discussions about asylum in Britain are characterised by “... negative attitudes, emotive language that depersonalises and criminalizes those seeking refuge.” Asylum seekers have been portrayed in the media as hordes of economic refugees, scroungers, bogus, fraudsters, and parasites as will be demonstrated in this chapter. The media is a key political actor when it comes to framing the asylum debate. A European Human Rights Commission aptly summed up the negative roles of politicians and the media in influencing public perception of asylum seekers:

The problems of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination persist and are particularly acute vis-à-vis asylum seekers and refugees. This is not only reflected in the xenophobic and intolerant coverage of these groups in the media, but also in the tone of the discourse resorted to by politicians in support of the adoption of and reinforcement of increasingly restrictive asylum laws (Bloch and Schuster, 2002, p.406).

In fact, *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* have been particularly venomous in their portrayal of asylum seekers as will be demonstrated.

The case of Dover in 1999 clearly illustrates the power that the media is capable of exercising. From 1996 to 1999, an estimated 750 Roma asylum seekers from Slovakia and the Czech Republic were living in Dover. Their presence was sensationalised particularly in the *Dover Express* and the *Folkestone Express* which referred to thousands of asylum seekers flooding Dover and putting a strain on public resource. Asylum seekers were negatively portrayed as “bootleggers” and “scum of the earth,” “targeting our beloved coastline” (Maisokwadzo, 2004) and one of the papers calling

on the people of Dover to reject asylum seekers whom it characterised as “the back draft of a nation’s human sewage” (*Dover Express*, 1 October, 1998). The result was a marked increase in tensions and violence directed at asylum seekers. This culminated in a widely reported altercation between a group of asylum seekers and local youths in August 1999.

The national media has also increasingly picked up the asylum story. The *Daily Mail* published an article sensationally entitled “*Handouts galore! Welcome to soft touch Britain’s welfare paradise: Why life here for them is just like a lottery win,*” (*Daily Mail* 10 October 1997). It published the findings of own research into Britain’s immigration crisis under the headline “*The Good Life On Asylum Alley*” (*Daily Mail*, 6 October, 1998). Dover was portrayed as a small town that was threat from multitudes of foreigners who according to the *Daily Mail* were not genuine asylum seekers but merely “playing the asylum appeals process.” The *Daily Mail* also carried headlines such as “*The brutal crimes of asylum seekers,*” which attributed the increase in crime in London to the presence of asylum seekers (*Daily Mail*, 30 November, 1998). Another article entitled “*Suburbia’s Little Somalia,*” accused asylum seekers from Somali, living “affluent, middle class Ealing ... thousands of miles away from the dusty plains of East Africa”, of being involved in drugs and crime which were having a negative on the affluent neighbourhood (*Daily Mail*, 12 January 1999).

Within contemporary discourses cultural and community integration, food is normally held as a celebration of multiculturalism (Hage, 1997). On the contrary, in relation to asylum seekers’ food habits became a target of the media in its attempts to portray

asylum seekers in a negative light. For instance, *The Sun* newspaper's article on 4 July 2003 entitled *Swan Bake*, above, drew on an old and archaic English law to accuse asylum seekers of stealing the 'Queen's' swans for a barbeque. This was followed up by another article in *The Daily Star* on 21 August 2003 under the headlines, *Asylum Seekers Eat our Donkeys* (also above) and *Hands Off Our Asses* accusing asylum seekers of stealing some of the donkeys used for rides at Greenwich Royal Park; and within the article it is claimed that "donkey meat is a speciality in some of the East African countries, including Somalia. And two areas near Greenwich – Woolwich and Thamesmead – have large numbers of Somalian (sic) asylum seekers". The effect of constructing asylum seekers by referring to their food habits is that it depicts them as the Others who are not *like us*, and are a real threat to British ways of life. The other effect of these articles is that, asylum seekers are constructed as social deviants that do not belong, are out of place and polluting the host country's ways of life (Malkki, 1995) and the criminality of asylum seekers is a common thread that runs throughout these articles.

Various tabloid reports seem to share the consensus that a threshold has been crossed and as such a violent reaction to the presence of asylum seekers in British communities such as Dover was somewhat understandable. It is important to point out that the vivid lexicalisation of asylum seekers is perhaps much more pronounced in tabloid newspapers as the above references suggest. However, broadsheet papers like *The Times* are more subtle in the ways in which they insidiously construct asylum seekers. For instance, *The Times* mainly draws a negative picture of immigration and asylum policies by focusing on the 'victims' and insinuating the potential for racial tensions inside the UK if immigration continues unabated. *The Times* also pays

particular attention to what it portrays as the government scandal on the immigration. However, it is less outspoken and dramatic in its accounts when compared with the representations of asylum seekers in tabloid newspapers.

The overall impact of these kinds of negative messages emanating from the media has been the depersonalisation, demonization and victimisation of asylum seekers. A MORI survey conducted in 2004 noted that immigration had become the third most important political issue in Britain. During the survey, the respondents perceived only education and health as more important. The overall outcome of such predominantly negative media coverage of the asylum topic has been to foster and help popularise a disdain for those perceived as foreigners, which is synonymous with xenoracism.

Therefore the media is certainly the thread that binds the discourse (Lynn and Lea, 2003) surrounding asylum seekers and indeed plays a pivotal role in the production and construction of particular forms of knowledge. In defining and categorising those perceived as the 'Other,' the press employs various forms of imagery to project the visible difference, religious beliefs and language differences. Fowler has demonstrated the importance of discourse as an extremely powerful means by which to facilitate and maintain discrimination against particular groups of people:

Language provides names for categories and also helps to set their boundaries and relationships; and discourse allows those names to be spoken and written frequently, so contributing to the apparent reality and currency of the categories (cited in Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.428).

As a result the once “morally untouchable category of political refugee” has been deconstructed (Cohen, 1994) by the media and replaced with the figure of the exploitative and criminal asylum seeker, who seeks to abuse ‘soft touch’ Britain (Conservative Party, 2001). This has made it possible for political parties to easily manufacture a moral and political consensus against asylum seekers through the use of language that removes the notion of legitimacy (Kaye, 1994b).

Research by Fowler (1991); Hodge and Kress (1993); Fairclough (1995); and Fairclough and Wodak (1997) have discussed the ways in which the marginalised groups like asylum seekers are portrayed in the press. The focus of research by Bailey and Harindranath (2005) is the presentation of asylum seekers Australian news media and in the news programmes aired in the UK’s BBC and Channel 4 stations. They analyse the Australian media’s reaction to the sinking in Australian waters of an Indonesian ferry carrying asylum seekers. They argue that asylum seekers were depicted as *illegal immigrants*, and that these depictions played on the legal/illegal binary. These depictions were used to justify the need to strengthen national borders and invoked “separatist discourses that clearly distinguish between the ‘us’ within the nation state and ‘them’, the outsider, the foreigner, the bogus refugee” (Bailey and Harindranath, 2005, p.278). Therefore by drawing on the *us* versus *them* oppositional binary a nationalist discourse, which emphasises national security and nationhood, is invoked to marginalise the constructed out-group through the calls for more stringent asylum legislation. Drawing on a corpus of 27 editorials taken from newspapers in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Achugar (2004) discusses the positive and negative representation of ‘social actors’ in those events with a particular focus on the representation of the Muslim as the Other.

Elsewhere outside the UK, discursive research has revealed similar roles of the media in shaping the discourse on asylum seekers. For instance, van Dijk (1991) provides a comparative analysis of the role of the press in the negative portrayal of asylum seekers in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In Australia, Pickering (2001, p.169) examined the discourses in the print media and concluded that refugees and asylum seekers were “routinely constructed not only as a ‘problem’, but also as a ‘deviant’ population in relation to the integrity of the state, race and disease.”

Construction of asylum seekers in parliamentary discourses

This construction of asylum seekers as the Other is further reaffirmed and formalised in elite discourses. Politicians also play a significant role in the definition of asylum seekers because they are the ones who make the crucial decisions on immigration, immigration restrictions as well decision relating to immigrants’ eligibility for mainstream welfare provisions once they have been admitted into the country.

According to van Dijk:

If ... elite groups ... engage in discrimination against immigrants or minorities, the consequences are considerable: the ‘Other’ will not be allowed into the country in the first place, or they will not get a job, or they will not get promoted in their job, will not get decent housing, or the mass media or textbooks will spread negative stereotypes about them ... the role of leading politicians, journalists, corporate managers, teachers, scholars, judges, police officers and bureaucrats, among others, is crucial for the (un)equal access to material or symbolic resources in society (cited in Every and Augoustinos, 2007a).

As such politicians play a crucial role in the official definition and construction of asylum seekers. According to van Dijk (1997b) and Reeves (1983) politicians do not provide such definitions from scratch as they derive their information and beliefs in part from other elite sources such as the mass media, bureaucratic reports, academic research as well as their interaction with other elites. Although officially politicians are supposed to represent the wishes and views of their constituents in line with democratic norms and theory, in reality politicians' access to public opinion is marginal and at best indirect. According to van Dijk (1997b, p.34):

Popular resentment against immigration, such as in Western Europe, is filtered through the constructions or interpretations of popular reactions by journalists or other professionals. This means that both the media and the politicians are able to construct popular resentment as meaning what they please, for instance, as “democratic” majority legitimization for the restriction of immigration or civil rights.

It also important to note that, the media and other elite discourses are also conversely influenced by the political discourses and the decisions made by politicians (van Dijk, 1991). Therefore, media and political discourses are products of complex inter-elite influences. As such, any analysis of political cognition and discourse should take into account such multiple influences and dependencies. Within this context, it is not only the power politicians can exercise in legislating and making policies that is crucial in the reproduction of existing inequalities. The influence that politicians can have on public discourses through the media and ultimately on the public opinion is also crucial (van Dijk, 1997b). Therefore given the far reaching nature of their influence, an understanding of how asylum seekers are constructed in the media and

parliamentary debates is necessary as social workers themselves are not immune to these discourses.

The extracts selected for analysis in this chapter come from a large collection of newspaper articles on asylum seeking within the United Kingdom during the period 1985 – 2009 as well as extracts from both the Commons and Lords Hansard over the same period. As in the case of all studies that use some strand of discourse analysis, there is an inexhaustible number of angles from which selected texts can be approached resulting in a multiplicity of features that can be pointed out from the selected texts. It therefore goes without saying that a lot will be left unexamined as attention will only be given to the focus of this chapter, namely to illuminate the linguistic resources that are deployed in the construction of asylum seekers media and parliamentary discourses.

It should be noted that most of the contributions to parliamentary debates on asylum seekers are ‘for the record’ and usually these are prepared well in advance. Given the current sensitivities around ethnic and racial affairs such institutional talk is highly self-controlled and carefully worded. In addition, given the existing legislation that prohibits discrimination and expression of racial hatred, politicians consciously refrain from overt blatant expressions of prejudice. According to Dovidio and Gaertner (1986), politicians resort to subtle and indirect ways of expressing prejudice, which are characteristic of the new racism and xenoracism. As a result, speakers attempt to maintain a subject position from which they strategically articulate their views and present them as reasonable. This is achieved through constructing their

arguments in such a way that it undermines and rebuts potential charges of prejudice, racism or xenophobia (Every and Augoustinos, 2007a).

Interpretative repertoires in anti asylum seeking discourses

The analysis of the selected texts revealed a number of linguistic strategies that have been employed in the construction of asylum seekers in anti-asylum discourses in the parliamentary debates and media discourses. These involve the use of interpretative repertoires. Five main interpretative repertoires have been identified:

- a) Constituting Britain as compassionate
- b) Constituting politicians as weak
- c) Constituting asylum seekers as bogus
- d) Constituting asylum seekers as a threat
- e) Constituting asylum seekers as a deviant social group.

a) Constituting Britain as compassionate

Discursive studies (van Dijk, 1993; and 1997, Every and Augoustinos, 2007b) have noted how both the arguments for and against asylum seeking are almost invariably prefaced with a categorisation of the host country being a generous nation with a long tradition of hospitality towards foreigners who are in need of care and protection. In their analysis of pro- and anti-asylum seeker discourses in Australia, Every and Augoustinos (2008a) have noted how politicians on both sides of the debate employ the discourse of 'Australian generosity' towards outsiders. Similarly Jones' (cited in Every and Augoustinos, 2008a) analysis of the UK parliamentary debates also illustrates how emphasising British tolerance and humanitarianism was evident in both pro asylum and anti asylum debates. In the case of Australia, Every and Augoustinos (2008a, p.570) argue that:

... ‘generosity’ is also used for different purposes in the Australian debates: to demonstrate that Australia’s image would be tarnished by this legislation and thus should not be passed; but also to justify Australia as a ‘generous nation’ and the anti asylum seeker legislation as legitimate and necessary. This use of generosity by both sides demonstrates ... that it is not the ‘content’ of nationalism that identifies it as ‘exclusive’ or ‘inclusive’ *per se*, but the ways in which such constructions of the ‘nation’ are used (emphasis in original).

The parliamentary debates that are selected for this study and are in favour of tougher measures are also prefaced with similar claims of compassion as evidenced by Britain’s long tradition of giving sanctuary to those fleeing political persecution. For example, in response to an emotive statement by Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North, in which he gave a detailed and vivid description of the circumstances of Kurdish asylum seekers before questioning government policy of not providing sufficient resources and detaining Kurdish asylum seekers who had such an irrefutable long history of being persecuted in Turkey, the then Minister of State (Home of Office), Tim Renton, began his defence by stating that:

I will begin by explaining the general context of the Government’s policy towards people who claim asylum. As the hon. Member of Islington, North reminds us, the United Kingdom was one of the earliest signatories of the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees. We take our responsibilities very seriously, despite what is sometimes said by organisations such as Amnesty International ... No one who does my job can fail to be affected by the daily plight

of people who are fleeing from persecution ... An application of asylum, I fully realise, as do Home Office officials, is important, sensitive and under our law must be properly and exhaustively considered ... No one is refused asylum until the full enquiries have been made ... If the interests of people genuinely fleeing from persecution are to be safeguarded, it is vital that the system designed to protect them should not be exploited by people whose main motivation is economic migration. I want now to consider the particular circumstances of the recent influx of Turkish asylum claimants ... (The Hansard, 26 May, 1989, Column 1263)

Within this extract, Tim Renton takes particular care to construct the United Kingdom as a country that is compassionate and takes its international treaty obligations seriously. He also portrays the nation as sensitive to the plight of asylum seekers hence the careful consideration that is given to every asylum application as well as the strict adherence to the law. The effect of constructing the United Kingdom in this manner is that those who are refused asylum are then shown as not genuinely fleeing persecution but attempting to take advantage of the system and British generosity. This way the subsequent refusal of the claims for asylum and the subsequent banishment of claimants is presented as a reasonable, lawful and justified response to economic migrants masquerading as asylum seekers.

Four years earlier, Renton's predecessor had also in similar fashion prefaced his defence of government policy with an emphasis on British hospitality. When asked how he could justify the first ever imposition of visa restrictions to a commonwealth

country (Sri Lanka), the then Minister of State, David Waddington began his response by stating that:

People who are not refugees and do not belong here have not much to complain about if we say that in this small overcrowded country we have no room for them. But people who are not just coming here for a better life but are fleeing from persecution are entitled to special consideration, and we have always given such people that consideration. Our tradition of giving sanctuary to those fleeing from persecution goes back many years. Recently ... we have given sanctuary to Poles, Iranians and citizens of many other countries who have made new lives here. I remind the House that the refugee statistics do not tell the whole story ... In addition to those granted asylum on the basis of individual applications, we have admitted large numbers of refugees under specific programmes, most recently the 19,000 Vietnamese who do not appear in the refugee statistics as such. Many people who are not granted asylum are nevertheless allowed to stay exceptionally because of the conditions in the countries from which they have come (House of Commons, 1985, 23 July 1985, column 971)

It is important to pay particular attention to the manner in which British generosity is foregrounded and worked up in the above account. The argument being advanced here is that in spite of having limited physical resources, Britain still fulfils its moral obligations of looking after the needy and that it “takes these responsibilities very seriously” (Tim Renton above). Britain’s commitment to those fleeing persecution is

presented as one that cannot be questioned as it is evidenced by the fact that Britain is one of the first signatories of United Nations convention on refugees. Almost invariably similar talk on asylum seekers advocating for tougher measures opens up with similar national rhetoric which is replete with various forms of self-representation. These accounts are also oriented to attend to potential criticism that may be advanced in oppositional discourses which could potentially undermine the notion of the British as a generous nation. As such, closely associated with this positive image of the British nation is the idea that in spite of its generous nature, Britain cannot take in an infinite number of asylum seekers since it is only a small island. Van Dijk (1997b, p.36) argues that these are “the ‘national’ correlates of what are known as face-keeping or impression management strategies in everyday interaction and dialogue.”

The rationale for providing such a positive self-image of the nation is primarily to provide a sharp contrast to the negative categorisation of asylum seekers which then follows in which asylum seekers are then portrayed as taking advantage and abusing British generosity. Such positive self-representation also has to be understood in the context of the politicians’ quest to persuade the wider public that their actions are reasonable and justified. As such, it then appears as though politicians are being forced by circumstances, in spite of their natural benevolent disposition, to react harshly towards the apparent abuse of their generous nature by the ‘illegitimate’ asylum seekers. This dualism has found expression in the well-known “firm but fair” government policy statements. Although finding clearest expression in the ‘firm but fair’ approach, this repertoire evinces several features. Britain’s compassionate outlook must be balanced against, “the current labour market situation” (Phil Woolas,

Hansard, 3 November 2009, Column 38WS). Equally, Britain's "long and proud history" of giving sanctuary to those with "a well-founded fear of persecution" (David Hamilton, *Hansard*, 13 December, 2005, col. 1220) is deployed as a tactic for deflecting criticism for restrictive measures; in this case the imposition restrictions on economic migrants.

It is important to note that constituting Britain as compassionate as evidenced by its long tradition of receiving asylum seekers essentially serves as an introduction to a real or mental *but*: Britain needs to remain realistic, Britain needs to be 'firm but fair', Britain needs to stop illegal migration, Britain needs to stop the 'bogus asylum seekers' who are abusing British generosity (van Dijk, 1997b). More recently, however, this strategy has morphed into the somewhat more muted call to "integrate those who need our protection" (Home Office, 2006, p.11). The balance of emphasis has shifted, quite obviously and decisively towards the need for firmness, with particular emphasis being placed on the speedy processing of all claims and the prompt removal of unfounded claimants, evinced in the other strategies (Home Office, 2006, *passim*; John Reid, *Hansard*, 23 May, 2006, Column 76WS). Nonetheless, as one government Under-Secretary of State put it, "We give asylum to genuine asylum seekers. That is something that we can be proud of in this country." (Lord West of Spithead House of Lords *Hansard* 15 March 2010, Column 449).

What is also clear from the foregoing is that the construction of asylum seekers within this interpretative repertoire is that the notion of nationhood is drawn on recurrently as a discursive resource. The responses to asylum seekers as the Other are formulated through invoking particular values of generosity that are associated with the nation

state and the nation's character. According to Reicher and Hopkins (2001, p.77) this is done "in such a way as to invoke certain general values about the treatment of others – we are a tolerant nation; we are a nation which embraces otherness; we are above prejudice ..." The principal objective is to side step allegations of exclusionary tendencies and racism as the nation is projected as generous and welcoming of the Others; except that the Others are the ones that are taking advantage of *us* leading *us* into taking these stringent measures that we would not otherwise have contemplated.

b) Constituting the government as weak

It is argued that asylum seekers are able to abuse British hospitality due to the weakness of the government as evidenced by its inability to manage effectively immigration and the increasing number of 'bogus' asylum claims. According to Diane Abbot, MP for Hackney and Stoke Newington:

The key to choking off unfounded asylum claims is to get rid of delays. The biggest single incentive for unscrupulous immigration advice telling people to stick in an unfounded claim is the delay. It has been common knowledge for a long time that it takes years to process an asylum claim ... [The answer] lies instead in a fair, efficient and speedy system for both the initial decision, and crucially the appeal. (House of Commons, The Hansard, 24 April 2002, Volumn 384, Column 409)

It is argued that because the existing government machinery cannot deal effectively and decisively with the growing number of the 'bogus' asylum seekers, Britain is generally perceived as a 'soft touch'. The effect of portraying the government as

impotent evokes a sense of urgency to secure borders. David Lindlington, Aylesbury MP, expressed his concerns that:

... [the long] tradition of hospitality is undermined by large scale systematic abuse of our asylum law. The Government – by their negligence, complacency and incompetency – have undermined public confidence in the law and betrayed the interests of not only the British people, but of the refugees whom our law and international law have been developed to protect. The Government’s record is dismal. (House of Commons, The Hansard, 24 April 2000, Vol. 348, Column 435)

Therefore, playing out of this repertoire is evidently not only in the defence of government policy, which must be robust – “*choking off* unfounded asylum claims” (Diane Abbot, House of Commons Hansard, 24 April, 2002, col. 409) – crucially it is also oriented to opposition attacks on the “large scale systematic abuse of our asylum law...[created by government] negligence, complacency and incompetency...[which has] betrayed the interests of not only the British people, but of the [genuine] refugees” (David Lidlington, House of Commons Hansard, 24 April, 2000, col. 435). In this context, the calls for tougher asylum legislation are justified not only on the basis of the need for an efficient administrative system, but also on the need to protect one of the putative core British values of providing a safe haven for the persecuted. More stringent legislation is legitimated on the grounds of protecting the genuine refugee as well restoring public confidence in the political system.

c) Constituting the system as dysfunctional

Regardless of the putative willingness of politicians to expedite claims and repatriate bogus asylum seekers, a third tactic is to characterise the system as dysfunctional and

its political masters as inept. Regarding lengthy delays in processing, the only two conclusions to be drawn are that they are either “a sign of a failing and dysfunctional Department, or...the policy of this Government” (Stewart Jackson, House of Commons Hansard, 26th October 2009, Column 12). Again, this evokes a sense of urgency which justifies the calls for the enactment of a more restrictive asylum regime.

d) Constituting asylum seekers as bogus

Another strategy used in the media and parliamentary discourses is to depict asylum seekers as ‘bogus.’ Perhaps this is the clearest illustration of the logically precarious status of interpretive repertoires as asylum seekers are frequently depicted as ‘bogus’, even though the judgement assumes the outcome of the application process, which, by definition, has not been reached. The term ‘bogus asylum seeker’ first appeared in 1985 in response to the growing numbers of Tamil asylum seekers. However, the term bogus asylum seeker, and the bogus/genuine asylum seeker binary proved too much a temptation to resist and became buzzwords for both the media and the politicians. According to van Dijk (1997b), it became a convenient rhetorical strategy by which governments and politicians could justify the enactment of strict immigration controls. Lynn and Lea (2003) have illustrated how the existence of the ‘bogus asylum seeker’ and the ‘economic refugee’ within the United Kingdom has come to be regarded as common knowledge. This is in spite of the problems associated with these definitions and that strictly speaking there is nothing like an ‘economic refugee’. Lynn and Lea (2003, p.433) have stated that, “the concept of ‘bogus asylum seeker’ has become so ‘naturalised’ within the UK, that from an argumentative viewpoint it is perhaps no longer necessary to defend the accusation that many asylum seekers are not fleeing from oppressive and hostile conditions in their home countries.”

However, the existence of this as common knowledge potentially has the drawback of allowing it to lose its persuasive appeal. In order to counter this possibility, the concept of ‘bogus asylum seeker’ is usually carefully linked to welfare provision to give it a powerful rhetorical appeal. Linguistic resources such as rhetorical contrast and extreme case formulation are also deployed alongside this concept. For instance, Lynn and Lea (2003, p.433) illustrate the effectiveness of this strategy by referring to one of the letters to the editor they analyse in which the writer states that, “Bogus ones are housed within weeks and the UK citizens, black and white, are left to rot in hostels ...” Evoking images of British citizens ‘rotting’ in hostels after preference is given to those asylum seekers, who clearly do not deserve it, is specifically meant to stir up emotions and foster a sense of resentment (Lynn and Lean, 2003). The concept of the ‘xenos’ assumes some importance in this depiction of asylum seekers as the Other. Asylum seekers are therefore constructed as outsiders/xenos who are perceived as an external threat that is threatening the values and ways of life of the British society. However, there is also a deliberate attempt to detach this depiction of asylum seekers from the conventional trappings of racism. In order to side step potential charges of being racist, there is an attempt by the writer to show that he or she is equally concerned about the welfare of UK citizens, both black and white. In this context, the resentment towards the identified ‘bogus’ and therefore underserving asylum seeker is portrayed as an understandable and justified response. In fact, in parliament itself, some politicians have explained some of the public resentment towards asylum seekers in this way. For instance, the MP for Maidstone and The Wealde, Ann Widdecombe, referred to the resentment towards asylum seekers in Dover and emphasised that in order to attain good community relations “... a firm and

fair immigration system is an absolute prerequisite” (The Hansard, 2 February, , 2000b, Vol 343, Column 1048).

In order to give credibility to the distinction between the ‘genuine’ and the ‘bogus’ and the resentment towards the latter, arguments are placed within the bounds of what Billig (1988) characterises as ‘reasonable’ prejudice. This is often denoted by the ubiquitous disclaimer: “I have nothing against asylum seekers but ...” Potter and Wetherell (1987) have defined disclaimers as pre-accounts which attempt to ward off anticipated negative attributions in advance of an act or statements. In this context, the use of disclaimers, as Hewitt and Stokes (1975, cited in Billig, 1988, p.112) note is a linguistic strategy called “... ‘credentialing’: the speaker wishes to avoid being branded negatively and, in the case of prejudice, being someone who harbours unreasonable antipathies.” In addition, as van Dijk (cited in, Billig, 1988) illustrates the introduction of contrary themes, often with a connecting ‘*but*’ serves to provide a denial of prejudice and imply that the majority of the people are forced by factors outside their control to resent asylum seekers. According to Billig (1988, p.113), the syntax of such a statement “tells its own psychological story: ‘we’ are not resenting ‘them’ of our own accord, but something, more often than not ‘them’ themselves, are getting ‘us’ to do the resenting.” This effectively shifts the blame away from the speaker squarely onto the ‘bogus asylum seeker.’ In relation to politicians, constructing asylum seekers as ‘bogus’ provides justification for the increasingly restrictive asylum legislative regime. Politicians therefore portray themselves as not prejudiced against immigrants but as being forced by circumstances beyond their control:

In this sort of discourse, there is a denial of freedom. Things are happening – to make ‘us’ resent ‘them’, to make ‘us’ legislate against ‘them’ – which force ‘us’ a necessity, beneath which ‘we’ must necessarily bend. ‘We’ have to do things, even say things which we would not choose to do, feel and say if we were free from the yoke of necessary things. In this way the discourse employs a style which simultaneously deplores, denies and protects prejudice (Billig, 1988, p.114).

Thus, the need to act decisively is portrayed as pushing politicians into making difficult decisions that they would not ordinarily make. According to van Dijk (1997b, p.36), “this dualism is routinely expressed by the well-known “firm but fair” move: Pragmatic decision making requires that we are “firm” but at the same time remain “fair””. It is also important to note that by emphasising the genuine/bogus binary, the argument that is advanced in both media and elite discourses is that they hold nothing against asylum seekers per se, so long as they are genuine. In so doing, both discourses avoid being positioned and labelled as overtly racist or xenophobic and at the same time the harsh treatment and exclusion from mainstream society of those deemed as ‘bogus asylum seekers’ becomes justified.

e) Constituting asylum seekers as a threat

Asylum seekers have also been constructed as a deviant social group that poses a ‘credible’ threat to western nations. The ideological purpose for constituting asylum seekers as a credible threat and the United Kingdom as a country that is under siege is to create a significant distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This is achieved through vivid lexicalisation to establish a wider polarisation between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This is

primarily achieved through the effective deployment of metaphors in the construction of asylum seekers both in media and parliamentary discourses.

A metaphor can be defined as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.61) states that the utility of metaphors comes from their capacity to make use of “one highly structured and clearly delineated concept to structure another.” This enables the understanding of pertinent issues as familiar terms are used to describe complex issues. According to Schoen (1993), these familiar terms which manifest themselves as vivid images have a ‘normative’ force that emanates from “certain purposes and values, certain normative images, which have long been powerful in our culture.” Charteris-Black (2005, p.30) sums up the importance of metaphors as follows:

[A] metaphor draws on the unconscious emotional association of words, the values of which are rooted in cultural knowledge. For this reason it potentially has a highly persuasive force because of its activation of both conscious and unconscious resources to influence our intellectual and emotional response, both directly – through describing and analysing political issues – and indirectly by influencing how we feel about things.

Therefore it is mainly through the direct connection that metaphors make with pre-conceived notions and images (as well as the emotions associated with such images), that metaphors can significantly influence how people think about asylum issues (Bleasdale, 2008). The fact that the meanings of the terms are familiar and shared by

the targeted audience means that politicians can vividly and persuasively communicate their perceptions of asylum seekers.

Metaphors are an important tool in the legitimisation process which is very crucial in political and media discourse. Metaphors are also important for the process of delegitimisation in these discourses. According to Chilton:

Delegitimisation can manifest itself in acts of negative other-presentation, acts of blaming, scape-goating, marginalising, excluding, attacking the moral character of some individual or group, attacking the communicative cooperation of the other, attacking the rationality and sanity of the other (Chilton, 2004, cited in Charteris-Black, 2005, p.17).

As such, metaphors are used both with delegitimisation and legitimisation effects. In the case of asylum seekers metaphors are deployed as part of the attempts at negative Other representation and positive Other representation as will be demonstrated.

Recent studies (Finney and Vaughan, 2008, Klocker and Dunn, 2003, Finney and Robinson, 2008, Pickering, 2001) have analysed the use of metaphors by politicians and the media in their discussions of asylum seekers. These studies have illustrated how the use of metaphors depicts asylum seekers as ‘different’, the ‘Other’ and a ‘threat’ to the nation. The most common metaphors used in this context, for instance, are those which evoke images of ‘floods’, ‘waves’, ‘tides’, a ‘deluge’, massive ‘flows’ and ‘swamp’. Finney and Vaughan (2008) have noted the widespread use of these metaphors in their comparative study of press representation of asylum in Cardiff and Leeds. Buchanan (2001) also noted a heavy use such metaphors in her analysis of

media coverage of the closure of Sangatte refugee camp and the arrival of its former inhabitants in the United Kingdom. The use of similar metaphors can also be identified in parliamentary debates. For instance, in his speech on benefit reforms under the Immigration and Asylum Bill, the then Secretary for Social Security, Peter Lilley, stated that, it was “crucial that the new procedures are not in turn overwhelmed by a rising tide of unfounded claims” (The Hansard, 11 January 1996, Vol 269, Col 331). This deployment of metaphors of water and liquids in the depictions of asylum seekers serves to provide a powerful and vivid image of a country that is overwhelmed and is at risk of being submerged by waves of people. It also further reinforces the image of a small island with limited resources that is struggling to cope with the influx. Under such circumstances, the humanity of asylum seekers and their particular vulnerabilities are lost in the overwhelming sense that is generated by these volume terms (Bleasdale, 2008). More importantly, it also evokes a sense of urgency to stem the tide that threatens to submerge the nation. In this sense the metaphors function to make the stringent laws that are then advocated for and eventually enacted more acceptable as they are presented as a justified response to a credible threat to the nation.

Furthermore, asylum seekers are constituted through the meshing metaphors of war and criminality. Pickering (2001) captures the power behind war metaphors when she states that:

A war is only won or lost and there can be only one just side; only one force can maintain the high moral ground – the righteousness of one side’s cause so great as to justify violence. The other is derided; impossible for them to assert the justness or legitimacy of their

cause. Sides are therefore demarcated, boundaries and lines drawn... In constructing a war, identities and individualities are irrelevant and excluded; there are simply sides – ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ (Pickering, 2001, p.174).

Thus, the effect of deploying war metaphors is to construct asylum seekers as the Other; the enemy. Buchanan (2001, p.13) noted how military references and metaphors were employed throughout the coverage of the closure of Sangatte to describe the number, position and appearance of the refugees:

... when the camp closed to new arrivals at the beginning of November, the *Daily Express* described “legions of young men” ... looking like a “rag tag army of conscripts” leaving the Sangatte camp. A few days later, an article in the *Express* warned of “ranks of migrants” who were still ‘massing at Calais’, ‘...fuelling fears that French authorities are failing to stem the ‘flood of migrants’’. When refugees who had been turned away from Sangatte were invited to take shelter in a church by a priest, the negotiations by the French authorities to persuade them to leave were described as a ‘siege’ or ‘stand-off’ that was brought to an end by ‘a dawn-raid’. The ‘siege’ ended with the refugees being surprised by police entering the church early one morning...

The effect of such a portrayal of asylum seekers is that it conveys a vivid picture of a country that is under attack and needs to act decisively to deal with the threat that asylum seekers pose.

Newspaper headlines are also sometimes formulated using such war metaphors. For instance, the *Daily Mail* on 26 November 2002 had a story entitled *Losing the war on asylum crime*. The overall effect of these strategies is that asylum seekers are portrayed as a credible threat not only to national security but also to the hegemonic ways of life of those falling within the remit of the *us* in-group. Instead of being “presented as people who are trying to escape threat, they are, in most cases, presented as the threat” (Bailey and Harindranath, 2005, p.283).

Furthermore, constructions of asylum seekers in the press also deploy metaphors that emphasise the illegality of asylum seekers and their ‘disposition’ to crime. For instance, an article in the *Daily Mail* linked asylum seekers to criminal activities by cataloguing 44 serious crimes committed which included rape, murder, sexual assault, and fraud (Williams, 1998). The article went on explain how the taxpayer by default was made to directly and indirectly fund these criminal activities. One of the *Daily Star’s* headings on 22 May 2002 claimed that *Asylum Seekers: 9 out of 10 are conmen*. The use of war metaphors and references to criminality has the effect of constructing the relationship between asylum seekers on the one hand, and the government and the rest of the citizens on the other, as conflicted with the potential of a violent showdown. According to McLaughlin (1999), such use of war metaphors gives rise to discourses of war which in turn promote the need to repel whatever is hostile and threatening. Pickering (2001, p.173) has also argued that “such representations contribute to the validation and invocation of repressive state responses.” Therefore, enmeshing immigration and criminal discourses with discourses about tactics of war further legitimises the harsh treatment of asylum seekers and their eventual exclusion. This is justified on the grounds of the need to

protect the nation state as exemplified by the moves towards making borders even more secure. Thus, the use of war metaphors further narrows the discourse on asylum seekers into one about nationhood. Significantly, the discursive repertoire of war renders acceptable and reinforces a sense of normalcy about the government's responses which may otherwise have been questionable and potentially met opposition.

f) Constituting asylum seekers as a deviant social group

In addition to being constituted as a threat, asylum seekers are also categorised as a deviant social group. Asylum seekers are sometimes portrayed as 'not like us'. This is usually achieved through the use of ethnic markers such as identifying asylum seekers in terms of being 'Somalis', 'Afghans', 'Rwandans', 'Iraqis', etc. A significant proportion of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom are Muslim. With reference to Australia, Karim (1997) has argued that people are socialised in a manner that implicitly and explicitly encourages them to identify Muslims as the 'Other', primitive, uncivilised, terrorist, the bad guy, female oppressor, and innately prone to violence among other things. In the post-9/11 context, such ethnic marking consolidates the construction of asylum seekers as the enemy 'Other' (Rashid, 2007).

The connection with terrorism also connects strategies d) and e), where asylum seeking is presented as providing a means of assistance for terrorists, or for deferring justice. "How many of those arrested on suspicion of terrorist offences since 11 September 2001 have at some point claimed asylum?" (Patrick Mercer, *Hansard*, 6 May 2009, Column 267W; question for Home Secretary; see also Frank Field, *Hansard*, 6 May 2009, Column 267W)

In addition metaphors of disease are also employed in constituting asylum seekers thereby underlining the need to exclude and expel them. The implicit ‘threat’ of sickness that asylum seekers supposedly pose is not hard to discern in political and media discourses. The interpretative frameworks of race and the integrity of the nation state provide a broader and additional context for the understanding of the ways in which the metaphors of disease are deployed in the construction of asylum seekers as a deviant social group and how this then underscores the imperative to exclude and eventually expel them. With reference to Australia, Pickering (2001) has illustrated how the implicit ‘threat’ of disease that asylum seekers pose is not far below the surface of dominant anti-asylum discourses. She evidenced this by pointing at the requirement for asylum seekers to undergo ‘health screenings’ and ‘medical checks’ even though “what people are being screening and checked for was largely absent” (Pickering, 2001, p.181). Similar perceptions are also discernible in the United Kingdom. For instance, in 2003, the Institute for Public Policy Research warned the government against the introduction of compulsory health screening, which were being considered as part of the Asylum Bill (Luedar, Hayes, Nekvapil and Baker, 2008).

The deployment of discourses of disease serves a double purpose here. On the one hand, in a literal sense, asylum seekers are constructed as a burden the NHS and also posing a significant danger to public health. Asylum seekers’ deviancy as a social group has been constructed in terms of how as a ‘diseased’ group they ‘exploit’ the national health system at the expense of the nation. This perspective has indeed been influential in informing some anti-asylum media discourses in the UK. For instance,

in a letter to the editor in the *South Wales Echo* one reader expressed her concerns as follows:

... it has been decided that illegal immigrants, failed asylum seekers and refugees who are waiting appeal to remain in the UK will now be given free healthcare at a new practice based at Cardiff Royal Infirmary. This will involve screening service for communicable diseases plus the provision of interpreters, putting an even greater burden on the NHS, which is breaking at the seams. While the indigenous population are expected to work up to 70 years of age, are left waiting on trolleys, operations are cancelled and people are having to sell their homes to pay for life saving drugs, certain immigrants who have no right to remain in the UK are to receive specialist treatment courtesy of the barmy army brigade (South Wales Echo, 3 September, 2008, p.18).

Another reader also wrote to *The Express* complaining that “Britain can no longer be the NHS of the world” and also expressed his bitterness over what he regarded as preferential treatment to asylum seekers. He stated that “British people of all races have paid their taxes for years but are being denied treatment by outsiders who have not contributed” (The Express, 29 July, 2004, p.57). Another writer also expressed his astonishment that “asylum seekers and immigrants with HIV are allowed into this country. So why are our politicians and government not protecting our people?” (The Express, 13 August, 2002, p.30). In these extracts, ‘asylum-seekers’ are constructed as a deviant social group that threatens the health of the nation, the very survival of the NHS, and also resented because they are queue jumpers. On the other hand the formulation of asylum seekers as a diseased social group slips seamlessly into the

metaphorical construction of asylum seekers as a pathological presence in the host social body. Pickering (2001, p.182) has aptly summed up the impact of constructing ‘asylum-seekers’ through metaphors of disease:

Disease sees asylum seekers constructed not only as problems, but also as deadly problems. In becoming linked to the transmission of disease an analogy is created: asylum seekers threaten the life of the host society – a society that is repeatedly presented as the healthy and the robust and the asylum seeker as the foreigner (pest), the polluted enemy that potentially compromises the health and endangers the wellbeing of the nation (Pickering, 2001, p.182).

Thus, the deployment of metaphor of diseases in the construction of asylum seekers has the overall effect of depicting asylum seekers as the undesirable Other whose expulsion is necessary for the health of the nation.

Dissenting Voices

Although asylum seekers tend to be predominantly constructed in negative terms as illustrated, discursive studies (Every and Augoustinos, 2008a, Lynn and Lea, 2003, Finney and Robinson, 2008, Every and Augoustinos, 2008a, Every and Augoustinos, 2008b) have also identified dissenting voices that offer counter discourses. The ability of the counter-discourses to reclaim the humanity and individuality of asylum seekers demonstrates the “stark face of a political ideology at work” (Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.443). An appreciation of this will enable social work to reject the inevitability and sense of ‘expectation’ that the kinds of treatment and services asylum seekers receive are necessarily part of being an asylum-seeker. Such an understanding may help enable social work to unambiguously assume a subject position in ensuing discourses

and reorient social work towards the social justice agenda and to see through media and political representation of asylum seekers.

In their study of accounts that oppose the dominant discourses on asylum seeking in Australia, Every and Augoustinos (2008b, p.653) have identified seven strategies that are commonly employed in counter-discourses:

- 1) The dissenting voices foreground the similarities between asylum seekers and Westerners/Australians. They argue that in similar circumstances “we would do the same”, i.e. flee our country and seek protection from other safer countries. This way they attempt to challenge the ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinction by re-categorising ‘asylum-seekers’ as *just like any one of us*.
- 2) They also attempt to draw comparisons between present day ‘asylum-seekers’ and previous ones such as Jews during and after the Second World War
- 3) They also draw on logic in their attempts to undermine the dominant anti-asylum discourses
- 4) They also employ metaphors and analogies in their descriptions of asylum-seekers
- 5) They also try to undermine the validity of the dominant discourses by drawing on those discourses that potentially may resonate with an Australian/Western audience such as the need for families to stay together rather than attributing asylum seeking to factors such as soft policies, economic migration and personal choice.
- 6) They also further argue that asylum seekers are *victims of circumstances* emphasising that they had no choice but to leave their countries of origin and

as such they deserve better treatment. In this way the counter-discourses are able to invoke a moral obligation towards asylum seekers.

- 7) They also re-lexicalise commonly used and abused terms like ‘persecution’ with more emotive terms to achieve greater impact.

These strategies are quite relevant as they also feature quite frequently in social work professionals’ discourses that are discussed in the next chapter. Within the United Kingdom, counter discourses seek to construct asylum seekers differently from the ways they are portrayed in dominant discourses. For instance, Lynn and Lea (2003, p.442) refer to a letter to the editor that appeared in *The Guardian*, on 3 September 2001, in which the asylum seekers were described as follows:

... we should remember that asylum seekers are locked up to have their claims processed at the Oakington immigration centre ... This is a reception centre in name only: even the Home Office has admitted that it is, in fact and in law, a detention centre. People detained there include children, pregnant women, the elderly, the ill and survivors of torture ... (cited in Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.422).

Such counter discourses seek to expose truth behind institutional rhetoric. According to Lynn and Lea (2003) the above account cuts across the ‘official’ language in its attempts to deconstruct the ‘reception centre’ and show what it really is – a jail. This way, the inhumane treatment of locking up innocent people just to allow bureaucratic and administrative procedures to be completed is brought to the fore. The ‘fact’ that the Home Office conceded that the ‘reception centre’ is ‘in fact and in law, a detention centre’ makes the argument even more persuasive and convincing. As Edwards and Potter (1992) state facts are quite difficult to refute. Referring to the law to define the ‘reception centres’ as ‘detention centres’ is an effective strategy that also

leaves very little room for a counter argument. According to Leishman confession is the “king of evidence” (cited in Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.443).

Furthermore, counter discourses also deploy vivid rhetorical contrasts in their construction of asylum seekers. For instance, in the case of the letter cited above, rhetorical contrast is presented in the form of the long list of those detained who are vulnerable which includes, children, pregnant women, the elderly, the ill and survivors of war and torture who are detained not because they have necessarily committed any crime but for administrative and political conveniences. Such linguistic strategies evoke images of the concentration camps and a totalitarian state. According to Lynn and Lea (2003, p.443),

Lists and contrasts are powerful rhetorical devices, and a more vulnerable and disempowered group of individuals as that [re]presented here, would be difficult to find. There appears to be little that is bogus or threatening about them; the image they conjure is contrary to that perpetuated by common knowledge. Here then, is a counter-discourse, which emphasizes how asylum-seekers are incarcerated, regimented and controlled in the most oppressive fashion.

Therefore, the counter-discourses attempt to reclaim the humanity and individualism that asylum seekers are stripped of by the dominant discourses as already illustrated. The ability of the counter discourses to reclaim the humanity and individuality of asylum seekers demonstrate the “stark face of a political ideology at work, or as Foucault described it: ‘power in practice’” (cited in Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.443). The dissenting voices reject the inevitability and sense of ‘expectation’ that the kind of

treatment asylum seekers receive is necessarily part of being an asylum-seeker. As a result of this, the counter-discourses then go further and attribute to government the same qualities of artifice and duplicity that are the preserve of asylum seeker in the dominant discourses.

However, the dissenting voices are very much in the minority. As such, their impact is largely minimal. Nonetheless, the challenge they pose to the dominant discourses on asylum seekers is significant enough to warrant counter arguments from the dominant discourses which seek to further marginalise them (Lynn and Lea, 2003). For example, during the debate on the proposed to social benefits for asylum seekers under the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Bill, Liz Lynn, MP for Rochdale, challenged government policy stating

Is it right that persecuted people should now become homeless and destitute? A number of genuine asylum seekers who apply in-country have been tortured. Should not they be treated with compassion, and not kicked in the teeth? (House of Commons, The Hansard, 11 January 1996, Column 337)

The response from Peter Lilley was that, “The hon. Lady's contribution was characteristically emotive and irresponsible. While this is an emotional subject, it is not a matter on which one should be emotive, which means stirring up unjustified emotion” (House of Commons, The Hansard, 11 January 1996, Column 337). Such a rebuttal is indeed characteristic and a ubiquitous response to similar challenges to the dominant anti-asylum discourses. It serves to reiterate the need for the politicians to be pragmatic about the job at hand.

Another characteristic response of dominant discourses to such dissenting voices is to differentiate the self even further. This is achieved by identifying what Lynn and Lea (2003) have characterised as the ‘enemy within’ – the white liberals. Since “categories are there for the taking” (Edwards and Potter, 1992), the white liberals are identified as a distinct entity that becomes the subject of attack in the dominant discourses’ retort. The white liberals are singled out as pro-asylum and espousing humanitarian and *welfarist* discourses, but in an allegorical and sardonic way (Lynn and Lea, 2003). Within such a cynical context, the very nature of those categorised as ‘white liberals’ is then regarded with derision. For instance the credibility of ‘white liberals’ is undermined by characterisations of being rich, patronising and often saying one thing but doing exactly the opposite. In another letter analysed by Lynn and Lea (2003), white liberals are accused of taking humanitarianism too far yet taking care to ensure that they themselves are not disadvantaged economically in the process. This way “implicitly, the credibility of counter-discourses is challenged as suspect, it is as untrustworthy as the people who promote it” (Lynn and Lea, 2003, p.446).

Discussion

It is clear from the foregoing that talk about asylum seekers is not inherently xenoracist. The extent to which such talk can be judged as xenoracist is largely dependent on the interplay of discourses. According to Tileaga (2005), it is judged not as something that is inherent to the discourse but rather as the *effect* of using specific discursive and rhetorical devices in order to achieve specific goals such as blaming and positioning asylum seekers as beyond the moral order.

What is not present within the anti asylum seeking discourses is the overt presence of a ‘traditional’ racism based on skin-colour. At times, the asylum seeker serves as the marker of legitimacy and tolerance in discourses aimed at limiting and removing the ‘bogus’ economic migrant. When it is asylum itself that is being considered, asylum seeking is portrayed as a ‘vulnerability’ that opens up the system to abuse. What is even more striking is that this shift from ‘testament to British compassion’, to the spectre of the asylum-seeker as menace is so effortless, and that they are not at all exclusive as strategies. It is in this sense that it can be argued that these various interpretative repertoires bear all the hallmarks of the ‘new racism’ in terms of the subtlety of the exclusionary tendencies. Within the anti asylum seeking discourses such tendencies can be characterised more accurately as xenoracist. This is because they contribute to an overall discursive strategy that is geared towards the exclusion of asylum seekers from mainstream British society.

An analytic focus of this chapter has been the analysis of the media and parliamentary discourses in their rhetorical (i.e. dialogic and argumentative) contexts. According to Billig (1988) one of the key features of accounts that are worked up in an argumentative context, such as the accounts presented in this chapter on the emotive topic of asylum seekers, is that they have contrasting versions. Due to the fact that the various constructs of asylum seekers are heavily contested, each of these discourses are influenced and indeed shaped by the other. This is why Billig (1988) has argued that discourses are constructed argumentatively. As such, both sides tend to orient their arguments in such way as to undermine the other. According to Every and Augoustinos (2008b, p.652), the various discourses “not only counter arguments voiced within the parliament itself, but also recurring in the media and in the broader

public opinion voiced on talkback radio, letters to the editor and opinion polls.” As such the discourses are argumentatively organised to explicitly or implicitly undermine or rebut alternative or opposing accounts. Therefore, these types of discourses can best be understood if they are analysed in their respective argumentative contexts which take into consideration those accounts that they are oriented to as attempted in this chapter. This has enabled a better understanding of the ways in which certain representations of asylum seekers are articulated.

Quite significantly, this chapter also serves to provide an important background for understanding some of the arguments that social work professionals’ discourses, which are captured by the interviews conducted for this study, are oriented to. As will be noted in the next chapter, social work professionals draw on some of the discourses which are discussed in this chapter and also respond to some of the arguments that are advanced in this chapter. By drawing on these macro or general and historically positioned discourses, such as the media and parliamentary discourses presented here, as a discursive resource, an analytic link is established with the local or micro discourses associated with the mundane day to day social work practice with asylum seekers. As such, in order to fully understand the local discourses associated with social work practice with asylum seekers, it is imperative that macro or general and historical positioned discourses such as the ones presented in this chapter are also taken into full account as they have a significant influence on the local discourses themselves. The macro discourses serve as a discursive resource and additional framework that has a significant influence on the orientation of the local discourses. As such, the meaning making process that social work professionals engage in their attempts to make sense of their mundane day to day tasks is embedded in a much

wider context. Although the focus of the study is on how social workers' discourses of asylum seekers and how they make sense of their work with this service user group, it is also very clear that the local meanings that are produced are situated and contextualised in larger and wider discourses such as the ones that have been presented in this chapter.

However, even the implicit dichotomy of 'pro-' and 'anti-' that is attempted in this study can only serve to provide a useful heuristic because in reality the nature of the prevailing discourses is never static. As Foucault (1972, p.100) states "... we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable." As such, anti-asylum and pro-asylum discourses cannot be analysed in isolation as they are intertwined, with the same elements sometimes pressed into service of either side. Given that the various constructs of asylum seekers are heavily contested, each of these discourses are influenced and indeed shaped by the other. It is important to emphasise that although the distinction made in this chapter between pro asylum seeking discourses and anti asylum seeking discourses is a useful heuristic, the very act of making such a distinction reveals their interconnectedness. In the light of this, the dominant anti asylum discourses and the pro asylum discourses cannot be analysed in isolation.

Chapter 6 CONSTRUCTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS' DISCOURSES

Background

Within the United Kingdom, it can be noted that there is an emerging body of research that has resulted in the development of a social work discourse relating to asylum seeking service users. This body of social work literature is relatively new and is largely sympathetic to the plight of asylum seekers. This emerging discourse asserts that working with asylum seekers is a legitimate area of practice and highlights social work's obligations towards asylum seekers by exploring some of the salient aspects of the oppression that is suffered by this service user group. As such, it focuses on the negative impacts of current social policies on welfare provisions for asylum seeking service users. For instance, research by Humphries (2004b) and Hayes (2002, 2004) demonstrate the impact of immigration controls on social policies relating to welfare provisions for asylum seekers. Briskman and Cemlyn (2005) discuss the role of social work with asylum seekers in the light of the restrictive and repressive UK social policies relating to this service user group. The discourse uses this as evidence to underscore the fact that working with asylum seekers is a neglected area of social work practice. This is done through highlighting the fact that in spite of the apparent need for social justice for this group of service users, this is still not regarded within social work as an important area of practice deserving special attention. For instance, Sales (2002) discusses how asylum seekers generally are perceived as a social group that exists on the fringes of British society and are regarded as 'underserving' of existing mainstream welfare supports. Similar research by Harris (2003), Masocha (2008), Masocha and Simpson (2011b) also depict asylum seekers as an out-group. As

such, this emerging body of knowledge draws attention to the various ways in which asylum seekers as recipients of social work services are a marginalised group and how this runs counter to what social work as a profession stands for as well as its underpinning principles and core values. For instance, Jones (1998, 2001) has suggested that social workers are ignorant of immigration law and its primacy over children's legislation in relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Article 22 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which came into effect in the UK in 1992, stipulates that unaccompanied asylum seeking children should be "accorded the same protection as any other child permanently or temporarily deprived of his or her family environment for any reason". This lack of understanding has resulted in asylum seeking service users not receiving the best service. Jordan and Jordan (2000) have argued that many social workers still do not accept that the social problems faced by asylum seekers are part of their core business. Such views and attitudes are likely to negatively impact on practice and result in asylum seekers' issues not being prioritised within social workers' workloads. Such views can also have a negative impact on social workers' ability to effectively advocate for this service user group.

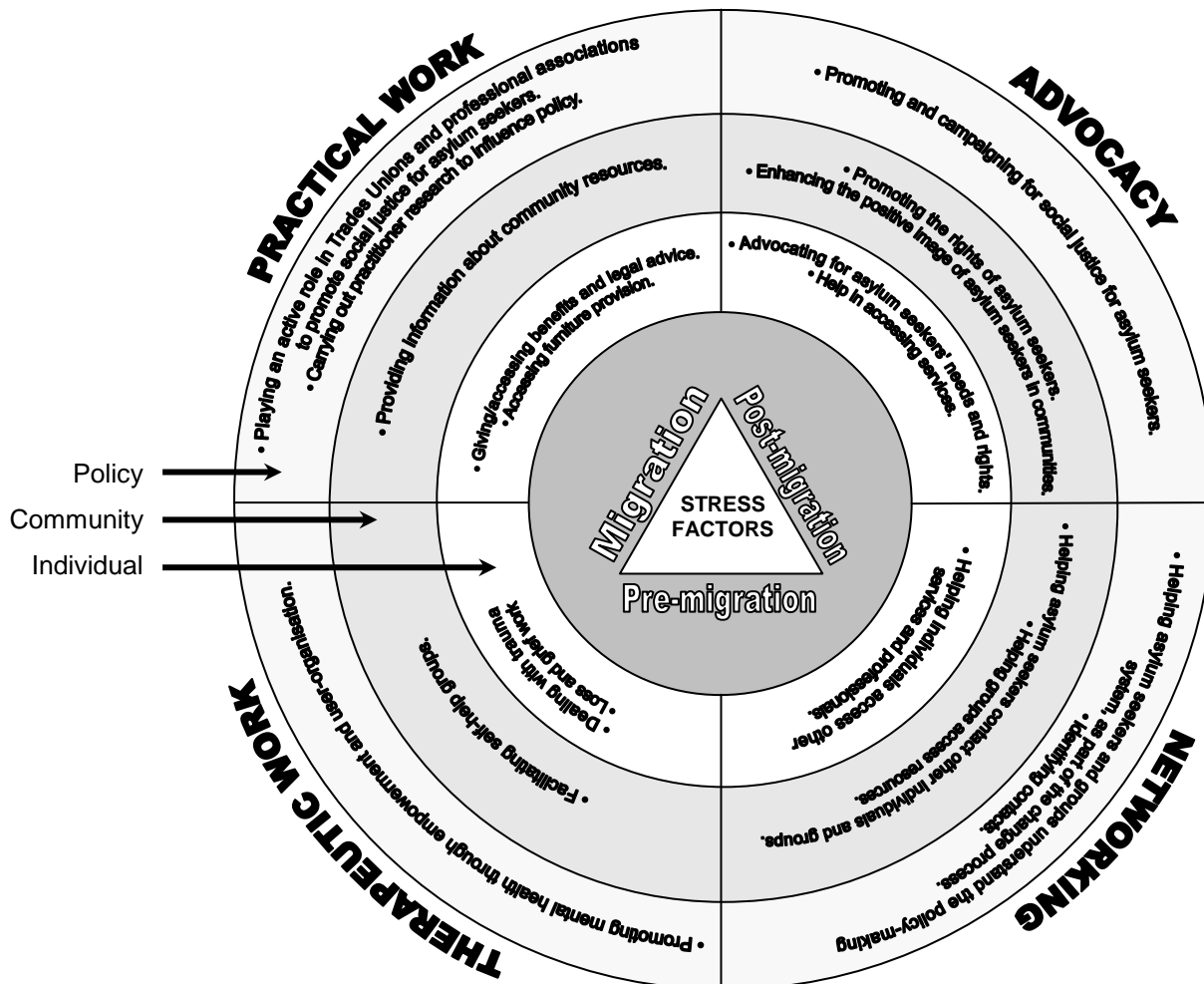
An important feature of this emerging discourse is the tension that arises between the dictates of current social policies relating to welfare provisions for asylum seekers and what social work as a profession stands for. Here the research literature focuses on the ethical dilemmas that emerge for social work as a result of this tension. For instance, Humphries (2004a, 2004c) and Collette (2004) have separately demonstrated how social workers are increasingly assuming the roles of constriction and gatekeepers of the welfare system and are becoming an extension of the immigration service. They

argue that in so doing, social workers are unwittingly being implicated in racist practices and in the process negating social work's commitment to social justice for the less privileged social groups like asylum seekers. According to Humphries (2004c), it is in the area of anti-oppressive practice that the rhetoric of post Thatcherite politics and the values to which social work aspires converge. The following themes have assumed increasing importance in post Thatcherite politics: choice, citizenship, autonomy, and social justice. These themes seem quite compatible with social work values and its commitment to strive for social justice for the less privileged in society. The problem is, whilst seemingly liberal policies are espoused, there is also a consensus that has emerged in which policies that systematically degrade and disenfranchise asylum seekers are called for and enacted, and social workers are obliged to implement them as demonstrated in Chapter 4.

Significantly, this emerging discourse on asylum seekers also seeks to achieve a better and more comprehensive understanding of some of the needs of this service user group and how best these needs can be met by a more enhanced social work role. In this respect, this emerging body of knowledge tends to concentrate particularly on two prominent areas of practice; mental health social work with asylum seekers and social work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. For instance, Chantler (2011) argues that mental health social work is in need of urgent attention as current practice falls below expectations. Chantler cautions against a heavy dependence on post-traumatic stress disorder as a diagnosis that can help in understanding comprehensively mental health distress experienced by asylum seeking service users and suggests a social model that pays particular attention to the wider circumstances of those with insecure or unresolved immigration status. Along the same lines,

Masocha and Simpson (2011a) have also provided an account of the causes of mental difficulties that are experienced by asylum seeking service users. They provide a critique of the research literature that currently informs mental health social work with asylum seekers. They demonstrate that the existing literature mainly comes from psychiatric studies which are informed by a medical model. They cogently argue that it is untenable to try and understand the mental health difficulties that are experienced by asylum seekers solely based on aetiological accounts that draw heavily from psychiatry and are based on biological causation. They present a more comprehensive model for understanding the mental health difficulties experienced by asylum seekers. The model presented considers both biological causation and a social perspective which seeks to locate the mental health difficulties in a much wider economic and socio-political context. Quite significantly, the study provides practitioners with a model (figure 3 below) that they can utilise to enhance their practice with asylum seekers.

Figure 3: Dimensions of social work practice with asylum seekers



Source: Masocha and Simpson (2011).

The model suggests areas for the development of mental health social work with asylum seekers. The model shown in Figure 3 above maps out some of the areas where practice enhancements can be realised. Furthermore, Kohli and Mather (2003) have also suggested ways that social workers can work effectively to promote the psychosocial well-being of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the United Kingdom. They suggest an approach that takes into cognisance both the vulnerabilities and resilience of asylum seeking children.

In a much similar way, the existing research on social work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children is also relatively recent and very much a response to a lack of knowledge on this service user group. Research studies on social work practice with unaccompanied asylum seeking children have resulted in a discourse that centres on policies and practice issues of concern. The research has also drawn attention to not only the needs of this service user group but has also highlighted some of the complexities and practice dilemmas that social workers have to contend with. Munoz (2000) discusses how three London boroughs respond to the needs of 16 and 17 year old unaccompanied asylum seeking minors and highlights the inadequate levels of support. Munoz's (2000) study highlights practice issues of concern which include the increased use of emergency accommodation which result in landlords becoming de facto guardians, the increased use of overcrowded hostels giving rise to child protection concerns, and the lack of a robust monitoring and support system which exposes the unaccompanied asylum seeking minors to risks of significant harm. Ravi Kohli has also made a notable contribution to the understanding of the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children as well as suggesting ways to enhance practice. This helped foster the understanding of

- The meaning of silence and secrets that unaccompanied asylum seeking children may present with and how best social workers can work in a therapeutic way in such a context (Kohli, 2009, Kohli, 2006)
- The meaning of food to unaccompanied asylum seeking children looked after by Local Authorities. The study explores the powerful relationship that can exist between food and finding a safe haven, and even becoming an integral

part of the foster family as well as the wider host community (Kohli et al., 2010)

- The meaning of safety, belonging and success for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (Kohli, 2011)

Furthermore, studies by Dixon and Wade (2007) and Wade (2011) explore the challenges that pathway planning presents for social workers working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. These studies underscore the importance of preparation and planning for transition to adulthood when working with adolescent unaccompanied asylum seeking service users. It is argued that these should be priority tasks and at the forefront of the minds of their care-givers and social workers. The studies also review the existing research studies on social work responses in England, with a particular focus on what is known about best practice in terms of preparing adolescents for adult life and on the challenges that the intersection between social work and the asylum determination process poses for pathway planning. Kohli (2007) offers a detailed view of social work practice with unaccompanied asylum seeking children who are looked after local authorities under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. The study underscores the need to view unaccompanied asylum seeking minors as children first and foremost as well as the need to view social work as an important therapeutic activity that can help this group of service users to establish some roots and stability in their host country. Kohli (2007, p. xxi) rejects the negative views of social work practice with unaccompanied asylum seeking children that tend to be portrayed by advocacy-based studies: “In a broad sense therefore the book rejects the common conceptions of unaccompanied children as victims. It displays their vulnerabilities alongside their strengths within the varied attempts they make to salvage their lives with the UK. Similarly, it seeks to establish social-work practice as

varied and rich in meaning for practitioners themselves, not as a deficit-laden activity". Thus a more positive view of social work practice with asylum seeking children is offered.

However it is notable that one important dimension that is absent within the reviewed social work literature and this emerging discourse is a critical appraisal of how asylum seekers as a service user group are constructed and its implications for practice. This study seeks to fill in this gap by specifically analysing how asylum seeking service users are constructed in social work professionals' discourses.

Framing Professional Discourse

An appreciation of professional discourses will not only result in an understanding of social work processes but will also enhance the understanding of their historical roots. The important role that is played by discourse within the construction and reconstruction of the social work profession is undeniable. Written texts, spoken discourse and various forms of non-verbal communication have played crucial roles in the historical construction of social work practices, and they continue to contribute to the reproduction and reshaping of these practices (Gunnarsson et al, 1997). In spite of the pivotal role that discourse occupies within social work, the interest in the understanding of the dynamics of professional discourse is quite new and largely undeveloped amongst social work researchers and practitioners. This is in spite of the fact that discourse is one of the central vehicles of social work. Social workers spend a lot of their time talking with service users and other professionals. Invariably these discursive acts are closely intertwined with, preceded and followed by writing practices leading to the production of reports, emails, contracts etc. According to Hall, Slembrouck and Sarangi (2006, p.10):

Daily work for social workers involves making phone calls, writing reports, talking to clients, colleagues and other professionals, holding meetings. Such activities involve talking, writing, interacting and negotiating with others. These mundane activities of daily professional life are not merely insignificant processes which merely operationalise, facilitate or frustrate evidence-based practice or critical reflection. On the contrary, the objectives of social work can only be realised through such mundane activities and these practices do not just have an influence on social work, *they constitute it*, they bring it into existence (emphasis added).

As such, discourse plays a central part in social work hence the need for an in depth study of its role in the construction of asylum seeking service users within practice.

In spite of the centrality of language in social work activities, within the United Kingdom research which pays particular attention to how language is used to enact socio-cultural perspectives and social identities has largely been outside the realm of social work research. However, there are few notable exceptions to this. Rojek (1988) and Fook (2002) have analysed how a knowledge of language use and discourse might be translated into useful practice strategies for practitioners. White (2003) and Hall et al (2006) analyse language use to understand the various ways social workers, their clients and other professionals categorise and manage the problems of social work in ways which are rendered understandable, accountable and which justify professional intervention. Hall (1997) discusses the everyday activities of social workers as performances of storytelling and persuasion. Parton and O'Byrne (2000)

analyse the relevance of social theories associated with postmodernism, social constructionism and narrative approaches to social work.

The study as already noted uses a particular strand of discourse analysis as a methodology for understanding the various ways in which asylum seekers are constructed through analysing the various interpretative repertoires that are employed in the construction of asylum seekers by social work professionals within their work settings. Sarangi and Roberts (1999, p.1) define the work place as a “social institution where resources are produced and regulated, problems are solved, identities are played out and professional knowledge is constituted.” In light of this definition, within a social work context the professionals can be accepted as constantly defining and redefining their respective discourses and perceptions of asylum seeking service users as part of an on-going process which in turn gives rise to the social production of meaning. As such, the work place can be regarded as a place where local discourses are produced. Hall et al (1997, p.281) characterise the everyday interactions on the work floor as ‘local discourses’ in their own right given that they provide social work stories that “are constrained by the kind of discourse practices that are available to them and are currently used.” Therefore, in this study, the local interactions within social work practice with asylum seekers will be viewed as local discourses. This study explores how such local meanings are constructed with specific reference to professionals’ perceptions and constructions of asylum seeking service users.

The previous chapter focuses on how asylum seekers are constructed at a more macro level in the media and parliamentary discourses. However it is not suggested here that

there is a top-down determination of practice. Rather this study represents an attempt to examine the production of linguistic resources at that level and to discuss how it functions to constitute subjectivities in the welfare apparatus. Again, however, it is also not suggested that it is the only source of discursive resources or that social work practice is affected solely, or even primarily, at this level. The everyday interactions within social work practice with asylum seekers are influenced by general discourses in society. Social work practices relate to what Fairclough (1995) refers to as ‘general’ or ‘societal’ discourses that are provided by the society at large in addition to the professional discourses. Pithouse and Atkinson (1988, p.187-188) have suggested that “within the social work setting, the actors’ mundane theory is a contradictory amalgam of formal social work concepts, practice wisdom and the workers’ understanding drawn from their participation in the wider culture beyond the formal work setting.” This means that social workers have other frames of reference outside their professional discourses which they draw upon. Indeed, as will be noted, within this study social workers draw on politicians and media representations in their attempts to make sense of asylum seekers and related practice issues.

Therefore, whereas chapter 6 focuses on the macro or general and historically positioned asylum seeking discourses, this chapter is devoted to exploring how at a more local level social work professionals construct asylum seeking service users and pays particular attention to the linguistic resources that they employ in order to achieve this. Given how asylum seekers are constructed in the media and parliamentary discourses and how social workers are not immune to these discourses, chapter 5 also serves to provide a wider background for understanding some of the resources that the social workers interviewed for this study draw upon in their

attempts to make sense of this service user group. In this sense, the media and parliamentary discourses are accepted as providing some of the additional frames of reference that are available to social work professionals in addition to the professional repertoires, institutional resources and frameworks. This chapter analyses some of the interview data from 25 local authority social work professionals who work with asylum seekers in various capacities. The chapter identifies and analyses a number of interpretative repertoires that are deployed by the social work professionals in their attempts to make sense of the asylum seeking service users they work with.

The analysis of the interview data collected for this study reveals a number linguistic strategies that are employed by social work professionals interviewed as they construct asylum seeking service users. The following five interpretative repertoires are identified:

- i. Constitution of social work as a caring profession
- ii. Constitution of asylum seekers as individual human beings
- iii. Constitution of asylum seekers as a resource
- iv. Constitution of asylum seekers as the Other
- v. Constitution of asylum seekers as economic migrants

(i) Constitution of social work as a caring profession

The social work profession is constituted by respondents as ‘naturally’ predisposed to be sympathetic to asylum seekers. The respondents point out that by its very nature social work’s role in society is to work with some of the most vulnerable members of society; and asylum seekers are one such group. In addition, various social work professionals who are sympathetic to asylum seekers draw on social work values to frame their responses. The social work values of respect and acceptance of human

diversity are fore-grounded and put forward as the basis for social work responses to asylum seekers. For instance, social worker 6 couches her response in social work values. In particular, she deploys social work's commitment to anti discriminatory and anti-racist practice as a discursive framework for her view of social work as a profession where prejudice has no place:

We have such a mixture of service users here and we don't have bigoted attitudes against any service user group. For example, we get quite a lot of transgender and transsexual people in here umm; we couldn't do this job and be bigoted. I mean hopefully someone wouldn't find their way through and get a job, but I haven't heard any attitudes like that (Social Worker 6)¹.

The effect of this strategy is to make social work's moral obligations towards the asylum seeking service user group unquestionable.

Furthermore, by virtue of being a caring profession, social work is also constituted as having a duty of care towards asylum seekers due to the nature of asylum seekers' needs. According to Social Worker 1:

A lot of people who come here [to the attention of social services] are very much in difficult circumstances a lot of the time and yet that is preferable to being back in their country of origin for whatever reason. I think in that sense, we have a duty of care to support these people.

By portraying asylum seekers as having limited choices, Social Worker 1 invokes social work's moral duty of care towards those in difficult circumstances. Similarly,

¹ See Appendix III for a general profile of the respondents.

Social Worker 12, who works with asylum seeking children who are looked after by the local authority, identifies not only a moral duty but also a statutory duty of care by virtue of being unaccompanied minors. Within the United Kingdom, unaccompanied asylum seeking children are considered as children in need under the Children Act (1995). Unaccompanied minors can be defined as any child or young person that is under the age of 18 who is outside their country of origin and is currently separated from both parents or caregivers. Therefore, drawing on social work values as well as identifying a moral and statutory duty of care are linguistic strategies whose main function is to provide a *raison d'être* for the sympathetic social work responses that are then advocated by the respondents.

(ii) Constitution of asylum seekers as vulnerable individual human beings

Asylum seekers as misrepresented: deconstructing the label

Having identified social work's moral and legal obligations towards asylum seeking service users, the respondents set out to deconstruct the asylum seeker label primarily through constituting asylum seekers as individual human beings. Two main strategies are employed to achieve this. Firstly, the respondents challenge and undermine the dominant views about asylum seekers which are portrayed in the anti-asylum seeking discourses which seek to portray asylum seekers in a negative way and as a homogenous group. The second strategy is to offer an alternative construct in which asylum seekers are presented in a more positive light as individual human beings.

Within the first strategy, the media and politicians are presented as portraying asylum seekers as a homogenous group. The media and politicians are then blamed for their role in conveying a particularly negative view of asylum seekers which the

respondents characterise as racist. This is achieved through respondents constituting asylum seekers as group that is used by politicians as a scapegoat for the country's social and economic malaise. For instance, it is Social worker 1's view is that in terms of politicians' representations of asylum seekers,

... a lot of politics is played out and [it] is about trying to please the masses. I think if they say, we have a number of immigration issues of immigrants coming across, again the press are very negative and put out very negative images of people trying to come across here. I am sure it's a very small portion of displaced people who are here or seeking asylum or a small portion actually gets to claim asylum. I know a lot of people who are returned back to their countries of origin (Social Worker 1).

Therefore, the misrepresentation of asylum seekers by the politicians and the media is accounted for in terms of political expediency i.e. "to please the masses". Furthermore, politicians are also accused of playing the 'numbers game' in their representations of asylum seekers with a view to mislead the public. Elsewhere, research has demonstrated how statistics can be manipulated by politicians in order to put forward a case for a more restrictive asylum regime (van Dijk, 2000, Buchanan et al., 2003, Goodman S, 2007). Social Worker 1 deploys the 'numbers game' as a discursive resource to great effect in his bid to constitute asylum seekers as deliberately misrepresented by politicians and the media. Quite a lot the media coverage of the issue of asylum focuses on the question of the numbers within the United Kingdom and specifically how many continue to arrive in the country annually. Within the anti asylum seeking discourses these numbers are then related, more often than not, to the cost to the British taxpayer. Other issues related to

immigration and asylum such the state of public services and crime are also contextualised by reference to the ‘shock figures’ (Buchanan et al., 2003).

By drawing on the ‘numbers game’ as a discursive resource, Social Worker 1 also highlights how statistics can be manipulated and presented as statements of fact. In doing so, he also provides a counter narrative to the anti asylum seeking discourse that tends to inflate the statistics to give the impression that the United Kingdom is at risk of being overwhelmed by the numbers of asylum seekers. According to Social Worker 1, “it’s a very small portion of displaced people who are here”. Social Worker 13 also makes a similar argument when she states that a totally different picture emerges “when you actually do the number crunching”. In 2010, the UNCHR indicated that only a relatively small proportion of the global refugee population of 15.5 million actually come to Europe annually. The UNCHR estimates that in fact 83 per cent of the refugees stay in their regions of origin in most cases only managing to flee to neighbouring countries. This has resulted in the developing countries holding 8 out of 10 refugees (UNHCR, 2010a). In 2010, Britain received the third highest number of asylum applications in Europe after France and Germany.

Therefore, by drawing on the ‘numbers game’ as a discursive resource, respondents are able to successfully respond to and cast doubt on media and politicians’ depictions of asylum seekers. The respondents treat the media and politicians with scepticism as they are regarded as having ulterior motives in their construction of asylum seekers. For instance, Social Worker 14 feels that the politicians and media’s representations of asylum seekers is largely about, “... giving a message not just about asylum seekers but immigrants in general and responding to *The Sun* and *The Mirror*, the sort

of papers that tend to whip up these issues, and the government is responding to that rather than looking at the needs of individuals that got here for whatever the reason.” Respondents feel that these negative messages result in welfare policies which result in negative outcomes for asylum seeking service users. As Social Worker 13 notes, “... the human being is lost in this. This has been my experience so far, and it has been so frustrating. I think a lot of the policies are politically driven and I don’t think they are really about the human being involved in this.” Thus, the respondents argue that the overall effect of the negative manner in which asylum seekers are depicted by the media and politicians is that asylum seekers have come to be regarded as an undesirable group of immigrants and their individual vulnerabilities and needs have largely been ignored.

Individual beings first and foremost

Having undermined the arguments forward in the dominant anti asylum seeking discourses, the second strategy is then deployed. This involves the provision of an alternative construct in which asylum seekers are presented first and foremost as individual human beings. The importance of doing this is that it reclaims the humanity that asylum seekers are stripped of in the dominant anti asylum discourses:

What I see on the news and local papers, I take with a pinch of salt because I know that, as I have just said, its sensationalism to sell papers. It incites anger, it incites hatred and I think it’s very negative. When you are actually working with people, whether black or white, you are working with a person. It becomes much more. Umm; obviously you are working within boundaries in social work. You are working within a framework, you are also working with people, especially in this unit ... I think we need to treat people

as individuals, with respect and dignity, and I think that's what we hopefully do (Social Worker 1).

It is also important to pay attention to some of the linguistic strategies that Social Worker 1 deploys in his attempts to re-constitute asylum seekers as individual human beings in this extract. Significantly, his formulation is argumentatively oriented as it is structured to undermine the constructs portrayed in the dominant anti asylum discourses. The social work professional's formulation of asylum seekers begins first by challenging what he believes to be erroneous views widely circulated by the press before he advances his view that asylum seekers are indeed individuals, each with an individual story of their own. Thus, media depictions are shown as untrue and removed from the truth; they are dismissed merely as sensationalism which can potentially worsen race relations within the community. Crucially, in order to give his formulation of asylum seekers credibility, Social Worker 1 strategically positions himself as being in touch with asylum seekers on a regular basis by asserting that, "When you are actually working with people, whether black or white, you are working with a person. It becomes much more." This effectively positions Social Worker 1 as having a more intimate knowledge and experience of working with asylum seekers. This particularly adds to the persuasive force of Social Worker 1's account as emphasis is placed on actual first hand and lived experiences within an institutional context where everyone is treated equally regardless of race or nationality.

Asylum seekers are just like us

The constitution of asylum seekers as vulnerable individuals also has to be understood within the context of a counter discourse that seeks to challenge the notion of asylum seekers as those who are *part of us* and as such present a threat to the British way of

life (Capdevila and Callaghan, 2008, Masocha and Simpson, 2011b). Respondents seek to challenge this notion in their construction of asylum seekers by deploying various linguistic devices. For instance, Social Worker 5 constructs asylum seekers in the following terms:

... one would be in contact with and speaking to the families and seeing small children makes it much more personal. It's not the type that is coming in and taking our jobs and things like that. Quite often I find that the parents are intellectually trained. They want to work but they can't; and they are even willing to do jobs that a lot of Scottish people would sit at home and not do. There is this whole restriction on them on working here and we prefer to give them money. I would say it makes it more personal when I see children, I see them with their mums and dads, and I see them as people persecuted, people at risk and it's even more shocking when you get to meet somebody personally (Social Worker 5).

In this extract, Social Work 5 draws on the nuclear family as a discursive resource in the attempt portray asylum seekers in a positive light. The family unit is invoked as part of an endeavour to normalise asylum seekers. Thus Social Worker 5 refers to asylum seekers as 'families' consisting of 'mums', 'dads' and 'small children'. These 'parents' are also portrayed as 'intellectually trained' and motivated to work and contribute positively to their communities even if that means doing jobs they are not trained for, including those "jobs that a lot of Scottish people would sit at home and not do". In order to complete the process of normalising asylum seekers, blame is then attributed to the asylum system which is portrayed as preventing these families from being active members of their respective communities. Therefore, asylum seekers are

presented as sharing with the rest of the British people the same putative social values that are held in high esteem within mainstream British society such those centred on the recognition of the importance of hard work and being industrious. Constructing asylum seekers in this manner reinforces the argument that asylum seekers are just *like us* and as such should be treated like *we* would treat one of *our own*.

Therefore, a counter narrative is also provided to the dominant anti asylum seeking discourses which tend to portray asylum seekers as socially deviant and having a very limited capacity to fully integrate into this new communities. In fact, the following extract from Social Worker 13's account is specifically worked up and oriented as a response to the claim that asylum seekers are socially deviant:

I deal with human beings involved. I mean nobody is perfect. I have been involved with this young person and came across an individual who was an ex-asylum seeker who aren't completely honest about their motives, but you know what; if I was living on benefits maybe I would be slightly as well. I am not advocating that people should be breaking the law, but if you are struggling some people may, whilst I don't agree with them I can understand why they have done what they have done. But most of the people I have dealt with are very honest people who are frustrated and fed up (Social Worker 13).

As a result, asylum seekers are constituted as having a lot in common with British citizens; the only difference being the legal status ascribed to them by immigration law. It is also worth drawing attention to how this construction of asylum seekers is worked up by Social Worker 13 here. This construct has to be seen as oriented to the

alternative depictions of asylum seekers as deviant and dishonest. As such what could be perceived at face value as socially deviant behaviour is instead constructed and rationalised as a *normal* response to an otherwise hostile environment. This type of response is rationalised by the claim that faced with similar circumstances Social Worker 13 would respond in the same way as asylum seekers, and such a response should not be perceived as socially deviant. It is also important to take note of how the press are dismissed as not depicting true events and disassociated from the actual human being. For this counter argument to be persuasive it is worked up and framed around the significance of lived experiences as Social Worker argues that she deals with the actual human beings involved in all this and the majority of whom are very honest people and if anything are struggling, frustrated and fed up and as such are far from the depictions in the press and politicians' speeches.

Asylum seekers as deserving 'our' sympathy and care

As part of the attempt to provide an alternative construct the respondents construct asylum seekers as individuals who deserve 'our' sympathy. Asylum seekers are depicted as vulnerable individuals:

If you listen to the people's stories, to their life experiences, a lot of it is pretty traumatic, pretty horrendous to think how it would be to be in that position. The fact that they are given little money and little support and that is better than being back in their country of origin says loads; doesn't it? I guess working within [this team] has opened my eyes to a lot of these issues ... Because you are working with people going through a difficult period, when people are

destitute, have nowhere to live, when their lives are really low ...

(social worker 1).

With reference to Australia, Every (2008, p.657) has noted that, “Whilst the equation of refugees with persecution is a common sense understanding, politically this link is being actively undermined by the introduced laws”. As Chapter 4 illustrates, the same also applies to the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Western Europe where a culture of disbelief and suspicion of the motives of asylum seekers is firmly established. ‘Persecution’ as a reason for seeking asylum is fast losing its persuasive appeal. The idea that people who seek asylum in the United Kingdom are fleeing persecution has come under heavy attack mainly from anti-asylum discourses as already noted in Chapter 6. The term has increasingly been appropriated by the anti-asylum seeking lobby, sanitised and is increasingly referred to in calls to restrict even further the numbers of asylum seekers that can be granted protection. Respondents appear to have an awareness of this and the futility of attempting to engage in this debate directly. Instead, they do so rather effectively without directly referring to the actual persecution that asylum seekers could have possibly suffered in their respective countries of origin. One strategy they adopt is to re-lexicalise ‘persecution’ and in the process challenge the scepticism associated with the general culture of disbelief. For instance, in the above extract, Social Worker 1 focuses on the difficulties experienced by asylum seekers *within* the United Kingdom as a way of demonstrating that there are genuine reasons, why asylum seekers come into the United Kingdom to seek sanctuary. He poses the question, “The fact they are given little money and little support and that is better than being in their country of origin says loads; doesn’t it?” By asking the rhetorical question, Social Worker 1 effectively undermines the argument that is advanced in anti-asylum discourses that asylum seekers coming to

the United Kingdom for economic reasons not because they are persecuted. Significantly, Social Worker 1 then strategically follows this up by asserting that contrary to the widely accepted beliefs about asylum seekers, his experience of actually working with them “has opened my eyes to a lot of these issues ...” The fact that experience is generally regarded as the best teacher gives Social Worker 1’s views of asylum seekers a lot of credibility and conveys quite effectively the idea that the asylum seekers in question must have suffered a great deal as the difficult life in the United Kingdom can only be a last resort.

Similarly, Social Worker 6 also adopts a similar strategy in an attempt to portray asylum seekers as victims:

I went to a really good talk by the Refugee Council which really opened my eyes to what it is like to flee your country and put your life at risk actually hiding away in boats and I really didn’t know much before that. I think dawn raids on asylum seekers are atrocious. These are people who have done nothing wrong and are no danger to anyone, ESPECIALLY children and people with health problems. It’s terrible. And I think the government seems to be concentrating more on sending people to some other country and deny them any money rather than, you know, recognising genuine people who need asylum for a good reason (Social Worker 6).

As a linguistic strategy a credible authority on asylum and refugee matters, the Refugee Council, is brought on board as the source of information and the reader is then taken through the perilous journey of the asylum seeker. As such, the views of Social Worker 6 are presented as based on evidence from a credible authority. This

gives credibility to the respondent's view that asylum seekers are individuals who ran away from persecution only to be victimised in the host country.

Therefore asylum seekers are shown to be vulnerable not only because of what they experienced in their countries of origin and during the journey to the host country, but also due to the various forms of treatment that they then receive in the United Kingdom due to their precarious immigration status. Thus a discourse of 'lack of choice' emerges in which asylum seekers are constituted as having very limited choices in their lives as evidenced by the limited access to mainstream welfare provision and limited opportunities to access some of the support systems and networks available to British citizens. This is attributed to factors such as persecution in their countries of origin and host countries as well the harsh and restrictive legislation in host countries. The effect of this is that it reinforces social work's moral obligations and duty of care towards asylum seekers.

The moral obligation and duty of care towards asylum seekers is further reinforced through constituting asylum seekers as struggling to meet their day to day needs and as such are deserving of a service:

Asylum seekers have no access to public funds; have no access to funds. Big, big issues; where do they get food; where do you get your accommodation; when do you get it, how do you pay for it? So, you may be able to apply for accommodation within [the city], not through the public, but private sector, you are faced with; I might get the house, but how am I going to pay for it? If I can't work, how am I going to find the actual payment for rent, paying

council tax, paying utility bills, and paying food bills? It's just a nightmare. Such a lot of pressure, a lot of issues, as I said earlier, which a lot of locals don't have because they are on benefits and get access to funds, access to housing; additional resources which asylum seekers don't have (Social Worker 1).

Here, the use of rhetorical questions to emphasise the gravity of the situation and the appropriation of an asylum seeker's voice are relevant and significant linguistic strategies. The respondent invites the reader into an asylum seeker's introspection. The effect is to bring the reader into the world of the asylum seeker and his inner most feelings. This way the observations made by Social Worker 1 are given a human voice; the asylum seeker who is struggling on a daily basis to make ends meet is allowed to speak for himself. The fact that this is used in conjunction with the rhetorical questions is very relevant as it serves as a further illustration of the difficulties that asylum seeker faces; the lack of choice in particular. This lack of choice is also further evidenced through the use of contrasts. The difficulties that asylum seekers experience are contrasted with those of British citizens. The effect achieved is one which shows asylum seekers as worse off than their counterparts as they lack the safety net provided by mainstream benefits which serves to further emphasise asylum seekers' vulnerabilities particularly to poverty and destitution.

Asylum seekers as socially isolated

Furthermore, asylum seekers are also constructed as vulnerable individuals through presenting them as socially isolated or at risk of social isolation. According to Social Worker 2, "For someone arriving in the UK, there is the shock of being somewhere alien to them, the trauma of that, the loss of relationships, losing contact with family

members because they do not know where they are or they can't contact them because they don't have the means." In addition, unaccompanied asylum seeking children are also seen as particularly vulnerable to social isolation. Social Worker 12 states that:

I think the difference with unaccompanied asylum seeking kids is that we haven't got a lot of time with them. A lot of our young people that we accommodate or look after have got family or friends or some networks they see but sometimes with unaccompanied minors especially the boys they may not even have the life skills. So who is going cook for them, clean for them or do anything? If they arrive at the age of 16 then there aren't any foster families to take them. So they kind of end up in a hostel because that's the only accommodation that we have for them; umm which is where we would place a young person but it would be something for them to umm have a room, we give them money each week but we don't have the time to spend with them

Young people are placed under the care of local authorities in the United Kingdom when there are deemed to be at risk of significant harm under the Children Act 1999. By using the contrasting 'fortunes' of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and those of their British citizen counterparts who are portrayed as at least having "family or friends or some network", Social Worker 12 successfully constitutes unaccompanied asylum seeking children as being particularly more vulnerable to social isolation.

Asylum seekers' vulnerabilities are also foregrounded through case talk. Respondents make use of particular ways of "telling the case" (Pithouse and Atkinson, 1988) which

combine what happened to asylum seekers in a given case with an assessment of characters and the constraints and dilemmas of professional practice. Telling the case involves particular skills in explaining details and complications that emerged. Pithouse and Atkinson (1988, p.194) are of the view that a social work case is a ‘bricolage’ in which information selectively reassembled into a narrative account often referred to as case-talk. This is achieved through the social work professional actively selecting pieces of information from the case presenting them as a convincing case. For instance, Social Worker 2 successfully portrays the extent to which asylum seekers can be vulnerable in a similar way:

We had a lot of Rwandan kids we worked with who because of the resources of this team were left extremely traumatised with no outlet for that. One of them came here and stayed in the system until he was an adult and ended up having a complete psychotic breakdown, he just went into complete melt down. What he went through was horrendous. He had witnessed the decapitation of his own father and being through something like that there are inevitable consequences psychologically. I feel I shamed that we hadn’t done more to support him. I don’t mean he wouldn’t have had psychotic episodes but it’s like when this unit first started we were just basically giving people money and providing them with accommodation (Social Worker 2).

Thus case presentation becomes more than just an activity in which “a case comes to life in the ‘here and now’ sense” (Sarangi and Roberts, 1999). It is an integral part of the constitution of professional knowledge as in this case it provides a vivid insight into the circumstances of the asylum seeking young person and an evaluation of the

support given to him. The manner in which blame is apportioned before and after the case description is a linguistic strategy that serves an important purpose here. It provides a constant reminder of the gap that exists between the needs of the young person in question and the resources that are made available to meet those needs. The effect is that it gives a sense of how culpable the local authority is in failing this young person. In so doing it provides a critique to the principle of low-to-no-cost provision that regulates the provision of services to asylum seekers (Masocha and Simpson, 2011a).

Asylum seekers as having significant health needs

Asylum seekers are also constructed as having significant health needs. Asylum seekers are portrayed as having “mental health issues” which impact on their social functioning (Social Worker 2) as well as suffering from other health problems such as HIV. Social Worker 1 constructs asylum seekers as vulnerable by establishing a link between their mental health difficulties and the asylum system:

Because I work with people with HIV, the people I see are all HIV patients ... For people we have got on now have got health problems as well as being with asylum and that whole timescale; not knowing when your claim may be heard; what the result will be; what the outcome is gonna be; how you gonna be treated that time; will you be treated at some type of holding centre. It just an absolute mind mine. The primary foci are so many. They are coming here for health but there other issues that affect your health as well. If you have got no money, no home, if you are not working, that is going to affect your health, your emotional well-being (Social Worker 1).

However, in portraying asylum seekers as having significant health risks respondents demonstrate an awareness of the implications of such a construct. Within the anti asylum seeking discourses discussed in Chapter 6, one of the reasons advanced for a restrictive asylum regime was that asylum seekers burdened the National Health Service which is already under significant strain. Respondents attend to this possible charge by arguing that the fact that asylum seekers have significant health needs whilst in the United Kingdom (which has this long tradition of generosity) is not in itself a reason for banishment but conversely is a reason to care for them.

In addition to the difficulties that asylum seekers experience whilst in the United Kingdom due to the restrictive asylum policies, asylum seekers are constructed as having experienced significant loss and grief. According to Social Worker 1,

A lot of people came over and left their families behind in their countries of origin and again that must be really, really difficult in terms of saying I have been here for five years and I have not seen my children for five years and in some cases more. So the idea of repatriating kids and stuff, I don't just understand. It's such a huge issue and quite daunting thing for a lot of people; that I have a family but I don't get to see them.

This adds to the picture of asylum seekers as individuals who are very vulnerable in society. Thus an argument is made that if one wants to fully understand this group of individuals then one should take time to understand their individual vulnerabilities and life stories.

In providing an alternative construct of asylum seekers, respondents are able to successfully portray asylum seekers as individuals with multiple identities. Respondents argue that the label of being an asylum seeker is only a part of their multiple identities. According to Social Worker 1, being an asylum seeker is “only one part of that person’s life” and “A lot of people have very, very, very hard stories which I think if the people were aware of, the situations and issues that a lot of people are dealing with, that would change the way asylum seekers are perceived.”

However, it should be noted that not all respondents see asylum seekers’ vulnerabilities as a basis for calling for a more sympathetic asylum regime. For instance, Social worker 2 formulates asylum seekers’ vulnerabilities in the following terms;

Of course we will end up with people still trying to get in through the asylum route but I think because of the tightening of the asylum route will be a bit of a deterrent to people who think, you know, we will just, you know, work or live illegally. The UK has to do something about it, it has to do something about the fact that it probably has probably close to a million people, officially close to a million people who have an unresolved immigration status who are living in the UK maybe without no recourse to public funds, being exploited, women in the sex industry being exploited, men in the sex industry exploited and exploited in the labour market. Those sorts of clamp downs are necessary because I don’t think it’s healthy for people come here and find themselves, you know, sleeping 10 – 15 people in a room. I am concerned for the

vulnerability of people and I do not want people to come here and be more vulnerable as a result of being able to come in unofficially.

Thus Social Worker 2 uses asylum seekers' vulnerabilities to call for tougher legislation and a reduction on the number of asylum seekers. Of particular interest is how, as a linguistic strategy, the conflation of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants is made by Social Worker 2. The effect of this is that it inflates the numbers and gives a sense of urgency as the asylum route is depicted as a weak point of UK immigration policy as evidenced by the large numbers of people who have managed to 'sneak' in. In line with Billig's (1988) observations on reasoned prejudice, Social Worker 2's argument is carefully formulated. Here the respondent identifies two imperatives for his views. The first imperative is that the United Kingdom has an unknown number of immigrants with unresolved immigration statuses. The second imperative is that the 'clamp downs' are a necessary evil to protect this vulnerable group from being exploited in the black economy. In order to side step potential charges of prejudice, he emphatically declares that he is "... concerned for the vulnerability of people and I do not want people to come here and be more vulnerable ...". Therefore, within the vulnerabilities of asylum seekers that the other social work professionals see as reason for compassion and the need for more humane ways of treating asylum seekers, Social Worker 2 instead identifies an imperative that justifies the need for a stringent asylum regime. This demonstrates how categories can be articulated and employed in discourse (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and why Edwards (Edwards and Potter, 1992) argues that categories are for taking.

(iii) Constitution of asylum seekers as a resource

A resource that is not being utilised

Asylum seekers are constituted as a potential resource that can be utilised for the benefit of the nation as a whole. In fact, it is suggested that asylum seekers could be the answer to some of Scotland's problems. According to Social Worker 1:

I think these are people with skills. They can work and want to work. We should support people to get into employment and stay there for a long time, or support them into college or university so that they can do some training whilst they are here and make good use of that time. At the moment, that is something that is not possible. I think we have got a lot of very talented people that we can actually use and support to go into the workplace and use their skills and talent, and yet current legislation and policies don't just provide that. A lot of these people do want to work. Umm; I think we should engage with that whilst they are waiting for a decision to be made.

Therefore, asylum seekers here are constructed as possessing the much emulated characteristics of the *good immigrant*. Capdevila and Callaghan (2008, p.10) have noted that in anti asylum discourses, *good immigrants* are often "represented as hard working people *like us*, with whom we share a common vision of Britain and Britishness determined by a shared moral sense, shared cultural identity – not by birth ... but by a sense of common identification with the British way of life." As already noted in Chapter 6, within the dominant anti asylum seeking discourses, asylum seekers are constituted as social deviants who do not fulfil this set criteria of what constitutes a good immigrant. However, in their constructions of asylum seekers, respondents provide a narrative that demonstrates that asylum seekers in fact possess

most of these characteristics but this is either deliberately underplayed in anti asylum seeking discourses or the existing legislation simply makes it difficult if not impossible for asylum seekers to demonstrate that they possess them. In order to accomplish this task of constituting asylum seekers as *good immigrants*, some blame work has to be undertaken in order explain why these characteristics are not readily identifiable. For instance, Social Worker 5 states that,

I really think we need to look at the whole; not making people to work, making people dependent on benefits when they are actually willing and able to work. We have people in Scotland whose long life ambition is not to work and yet we complain about people coming in to take our jobs. Actually it's about realising we have a workforce available and making people feel empowered and contributing.

Thus, the asylum system is blamed for forcing asylum seekers into a life of dependency on state benefits. Therefore, asylum seekers' so called social deviancy is one that is forced upon them.

Furthermore, both Social Worker 1 and Social Worker 5 bring to attention the current discord between policy and the situation on the ground. One such discord they both highlight is the fact that Scotland needs manpower due to its demographic composition yet it has asylum seekers who are willing to work but are being forced to be dependent on state support primarily due to political reasons. Through referring to specific cases that they have been involved with, respondents are able to illustrate this contradiction even more clearly. For instance, Social Worker 7 refers to case in which

she depicts asylum seekers as willing to work but forced into a life of dependency on state benefits:

I worked with a family from Zimbabwe who were failed asylum seekers but had written to the Home Office for a legacy and they lived in England and came to [this city] and even though asylum seekers need permission to work he managed to work for the council in the local community library. He worked through there for a couple of years and it was only after he went for promotion that the council realised that they were employing someone who was an asylum seeker and had no legal kind of right to be in the country. He was working and contributing towards the community in the work he was doing but his immigration status says you are not allowed to work. And it came to the point where it became a case where the social work department are paying for their maintenance yet they were willing to work...

The effect of such a formulation is that it shows asylum seekers in a much more positive light. For instance, the motivation and desire to work and contribute positively to the community is given prominence by the fact that the asylum seeker in this case had to cheat the system to be a *good immigrant*. The picture that then emerges is one in which existing legislation and policies are portrayed as a significant stumbling block that asylum seekers have to find clandestine ways to circumvent in order to demonstrate that indeed they can contribute positively to their communities. Through such a depiction, the responsibility for asylum seekers ending up being a burden to the taxpayer is shifted away from asylum seekers as it is explained in terms of what is portrayed as unreasonable constraints imposed by existing legislation and

policies. Social worker 7 uses this specific case to evidence her assertion that, “Most of the asylum seeking families we have are willing to work and want to work and do any type of work and yet are not allowed and we are paying them money from a budget we don’t have. I think it’s ridiculous!” This way case-talk is used as a strategy to challenge the notion that asylum seekers are a drain on public resources. Chapter 5 has discussed how this notion of asylum seekers as a drain on the public purse the features predominantly in anti asylum seeking discourses and how it is used to justify calls for tougher anti-asylum seeking legislation. Here the same notion is used to serve a different purpose. It is used to illustrate that the fact that asylum seekers are viewed as a drain on public resources is primarily because of madness of the existing legislation. Thus the blame is shifted away from asylum seekers and put squarely onto the government.

Furthermore, Scotland’s demographic structure is drawn upon as a discursive resource to further demonstrate that asylum seekers are potentially a valuable resource. For instance, Social Worker 5 questions the rationale behind not utilising this much-needed resource and accuses the government of duplicity; “You feel like locking them up and sending them away somewhere why? Especially when we have a diminishing population; Alex Salmond is talking about homecoming and bringing more people in the population when we have right wing immigration laws.”

In addition to being a much needed human resource, asylum seekers are also constructed as a source of cultural richness and diversity which can contribute to racial tolerance:

In any case in Scotland the population is diminishing and we are getting older, so we need more people to be part of the community and get care jobs and voluntary jobs. We don't need to be just a small ageing population either. We need to have a mixture. I mean, having lived in London I noticed when I came to [this city] how white the population appeared having been used to such a mixed population. I think it's changing and I think it's good from kind of racial attitudes if you like. There is a lot of ways people can give; it's not about money (Social Worker 5).

It is important to note that the overall effect of constructing asylum seekers in this way is that it also provides a counter argument to claims by politicians such as Anne Widdecombe as noted in Chapter 5 and Michael Howard (see for detailed information, Capdevila and Callaghan, 2008) that immigration and asylum pose a significant threat to community relations, racial harmony, even national security and the British way of life. Thus a counter narrative is provided to the spectre of the *enemy within* (Fekete, 2004, Lynn and Lea, 2003) as asylum seekers are constituted as a pool of human resources that can be tapped into to solve some of the social and economic problems bedevilling the country.

(iv) Constitution of asylum seekers as the Other

Asylum seekers are also constructed as the Other as there is a recognition in respondents' accounts that asylum seekers are not part of mainstream British society. As such, asylum seekers as a service user group are constructed as a deviation from what are presented as typical service user groups that social workers are accustomed to working with. For instance, Social Worker 6 makes this distinction on the basis of

asylum seekers' peculiar experiences. She states that "Every case that I have sort of come across of asylum seeking or somebody with no recourse to public funds is different just like everybody who comes here; but there are always more different because these people would have had extraordinary journeys to be get to where they are." Similarly, Social Worker 1 is of the view that generally asylum seekers' "problems are the same as with a lot of the other users of services, just compounded much more by the additional stressors" of seeking asylum and lack of robust statutory support systems.

The cultural Other

Asylum seekers are identified not as part of mainstream society but as the outsider on the basis of their culture. Scheppers et al (2006) in their study of Dutch mental healthcare services found that immigrant service users are often seen as being different because of their culture. They also claim that migrants are also defined as high risk groups and problem groups. Van Dongen (2003 cited in, Haar, 2007) argues that immigrant service users are treated as an anomaly and are categorised as an irregularity that do not fit the available 'classifications.' As such immigrant service users are constructed as a separate group that does not conform to the Dutch norms. In this context, culture becomes a way of differentiating people or what van Dijk (2004) calls the "cultural others." Within the interviews conducted with social work professionals', the term culture is deployed as a signifier of difference – a particular marker for ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom. Within their accounts, the respondents constitute asylum seekers as the cultural Other. Within that context, culture is also portrayed in a largely negative sense. For instance, an asylum seeker's culture is portrayed as an impediment to social integration by Social worker 4:

I think, if I am going to be completely honest and not be PC again, I think there are aspects where at times people perhaps should realise that they are now in Britain and there are things perhaps that may not be acceptable in their country, but are unfortunately the ways we do things here; and that can be hard if you come across it. Some of my colleagues here one day had to run out to the back because there was an Asian family beating up a fourteen year old boy and they said that was ok in their culture, but to us that is completely not acceptable in our country.

The use of specific linguistic devices by Social Worker 4 here needs to be noted. Of particular importance is the strategic use of the ethnic marker ‘Asian’ as well as how this is deployed alongside the *us v them* binary in the account which effectively depicts the asylum seeking family in question as the cultural Other. Furthermore, the use of the phrases ‘our country’ and ‘their country’ also has a relevant spatial illocutionary force, which effectively reinforces the fact that the asylum seeker is essentially an outsider. The spatial illocutionary effect is further reinforced by Social Worker 4’s insistence that this is the way “*we do things here*”. Thus, in this context, culture is used as a relational and “referential demarcator measuring the distance these Others stand in relation to the Caucasian mainstream” (Park, 2005, p.21). In the above extract, “telling the case” (Pithouse and Atkinson, 1988) is a linguistic strategy that is used to significant effect by Social Worker 4 to mark the service users’ behaviour as deviant and in sharp contrast with perceived normality. The moral character of the service users is made available through their actions as the case is narrated.

Asylum seekers are therefore constructed as not like ‘us’ and not willing to acculturate to the British ways of life in a manner that is not dissimilar to that depicted in anti-asylum discourses discussed in the Chapter 6. Therefore, asylum seekers are depicted as demonstrating an unwillingness to acculturate to ‘British’ ways of life despite having made a conscious decision to live in Britain. The effect of such a formulation is that blame is apportioned to the asylum seekers. The result of this is that asylum seekers become complicit in their social marginalisation. Furthermore, asylum seekers are constructed as not fitting into the conventional service user roles. In the extract from Social Worker 4 above, they are characterised as not taking their responsibilities seriously, and as not being sufficiently reflective on their own lives. By asserting that, “They said that it was ok in their culture, but to us, it is not completely acceptable in our country”, Social Worker 4 effectively constructs the asylum seeker in question as not being sufficiently reflective on their circumstances and not making an effort to integrate into mainstream society. Asylum seekers are also shown as difficult to engage with. In instances of such “difficult cases”, the main explanation given by the respondents regarding the difficulties they experience whilst working with asylum seekers was “their culture”. Being identified as an asylum seeker appears to implicate, at least to some of the respondents, that such characteristics would automatically fit the service user as exemplified by the general reluctance, by social workers to assume case responsibility for asylum seeking clients’ that was expressed by a majority of respondents.

There is also a general expectation amongst the respondents that the asylum seeking service users should assimilate into a dominant – ‘modern’ or middle class – patterns of values, although social work professionals see their role as primarily one of

empowering asylum seekers to do so. For instance, Social Worker 12's observes in relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children that, "we can't recreate their home environments, where everybody speaks their language and where schools speak their language. Unfortunately, English is something they will have to have a grasp of if they are really to succeed and to work out what is really going on for them". As such, he recommends that what is needed are "better English classes, more intensive English" for this social group to integrate into mainstream society.

The Legal Other

Asylum seekers are constructed as a social group that exists on the margins of society due to their legal status in the United Kingdom. As illustrated in Chapter 4, asylum seekers are not entitled to the same welfare rights as British citizens. Respondents acknowledge that asylum seekers' legal status within the United Kingdom identifies them as the Other resulting in differential treatment. According to Social Worker 1,

Just the way policies, legislation is; is that there are restrictions on how you can sort of support people given the restriction on their visas and I think that is very much difficult because you want to support people across board, as individuals equally and yet there are certain things that you are not able to do because certainly there are restrictions and limitations in place.

Such a construction of asylum seekers also has to be understood in the context of an attempt by social work professionals to justify current practice which sees asylum seekers receiving different levels of services from mainstream service users. By producing an account of competent social work practice, potential charges of discriminatory practice can be side stepped (Hall et al., 2006). In that context, such

differential treatment could potentially lead to charges of discriminatory practice. According to Social Worker 1, asylum seekers' immigration status sets them apart from mainstream service users and identifies them as a separate legal entity, and that has ramifications on their entitlements. According to the respondents, the result is that asylum seekers receive differential treatment even though social work values and ethics demand that everyone be treated the same and according to their needs. Chapter 7 focuses on how such accounts of competent social work practice are worked up in professionals' discourses.

Respondents argue that it is primarily because asylum seekers are the legal Other that they are unjustly treated. According to Social Worker 1, asylum seekers are unjustly treated and that type of treatment is part of government policy:

I think it's very unfair. I think there has to be some type of safeguarding boundaries and support as available to the rest of us, and that is obviously something that we do need. However, these people by and large have no recourse to public funds, have no recourse to public housing, have no recourse to access to work because they are denied work permits. I think that is very limiting, very unfair, very unjust. I do not know how they can expect people to live. They do provide obviously asylum support, but that is very limited and for a lot of people unless you are on Section 4; payment just stops. Where is the choice in that? There isn't. And you could be on that for many years. I think the system at the moment is that it can take a very long time for someone who originally or initially

makes an application for asylum or immigration on human rights to actually make them to get a decision.

Thus respondents make links between legal status accorded by immigration law and the differential treatment that asylum seekers then receive particularly in relation to welfare benefits. As will be noted in Chapter 7, making such a link *inter alia* constructs social work as severely constrained by the law in so far as striving for social justice for this service user group is concerned. This is an important strategy of positive self-representation as social workers are then understood as having a desire to improve the welfare of asylum seekers but are hamstrung by existing legislation. Such a strategy side-steps potential charges of discriminatory practice on the part of social work.

(v) Constitution of asylum seekers as economic migrants

Asylum seekers are also constituted as economic migrants within social work professionals' discourses. Although the social work professionals concerned do not categorise asylum seekers as bogus, this is implicit in their depictions. The following extract from Social Worker 25 clearly conveys the same notion, as in media and parliamentary discourses discussed in the last chapter, which purports that the vast majority of asylum seekers are not genuinely seeking sanctuary from persecution but are rather motivated by economic motives:

Of course that [asylum] is a route into a life of, you want to call it say privilege; but privilege is such a relative thing. But, it is privilege for somebody in Pakistan living in those conditions, you know. It's access to all those things; access to welfare benefits,

education and other things you wouldn't have, and a lifestyle you wouldn't have, and a lifestyle you wouldn't be able to afford at home; the comfort of security and all the other things that the human condition craves (Social Worker 25).

This depiction of asylum seekers makes links between asylum seeking and economic migration and in the process casts a shadow on the reasons given by individuals for seeking asylum.

Respondents deploy a number of linguistic devices in their attempts to construct asylum seekers as economic migrants. For instance, Social Worker 25 begins his formulation of asylum seekers as economic migrants by stating that he does not necessarily consider himself as an expert in asylum seeking matters. However, he goes on to state that he has vast experience working with this service user group and claims that "there won't be anybody within [the local authority] who has as much experience" and that he has "witnessed the evolution of legislative changes in the last ten years" (Social Worker 25). Beginning his formulation with a disclaimer that he is no expert but going on to stake a claim that he has unrivalled knowledge and experience is a rhetorical strategy – *diminutio* – that is reminiscent of Chaucer's work. For instance, at the beginning of one of Chaucer's *Canterbury's Tales*, the Franklin begins narrating his tale by apologising for his ignorance in rhetoric in a similar manner. In spite of professing ignorance, the Franklin then goes on to demonstrate within the prologue and indeed within the tale itself that he is in fact schooled in rhetoric as he refers for instance to linguistic devices originally defined and illustrated in Cicero's Latin treatise *Ad Herennium* (Harrison, 1935). The use of a disclaimer serves a purpose here. Like the Franklin, the effect of employing this rhetorical device

is that Social Worker 25 calls attention to his expertise in this area of practice in the very act of disclaiming it.

Furthermore, prefacing his views with such a rhetorical device has the effect of positioning the social worker as a humble but expert respondent which makes the negative formulation of asylum seekers which then follows somewhat credible, reasonable and more or less acceptable as it is presented as based on extensive experience and an 'existing' body of knowledge. In this respect, Social Worker 25's view that a lot of the asylum seekers are economic migrants is closely linked to both practice wisdom and what the social worker perceives as common knowledge:

I think because of my experiences in working with asylum seekers for so long ... it will be stupid to say there aren't out of the numbers that I have worked with a lot of people that are chancing it. Of course any system is open to exploitation. And I think what has happened in the UK's asylum policy is that a lot of people who are economic migrants are using asylum as means of entering the UK.

Here it is significant that Social Worker 25 invokes shared knowledge as a linguistic strategy. In this formulation, what is advanced as a general rule that is also considered as common knowledge (i.e. any system is open to exploitation) is evidenced by the social worker's real experiences of working with asylum seeking service users. Similarly, Social Worker 2 also relates how from practice experience she knows that many economic migrants are posing as asylum seekers and how it is common knowledge that many of those that are presenting at airports are "being advised before they arrived into the UK that the way to get into the UK and have some freedom of movement was to make an asylum claim". By combining practice wisdom and what is

generally presented as common knowledge, both Social Worker 25 and 2 are able to persuasively portray the majority of asylum seekers as not genuine but in fact ‘chancing it’. The effect of utilising practice wisdom and combining it with a body of knowledge that is presented as common knowledge is that it distances the social work professional away from the negative formulation of asylum seekers that is then made. The negative formulation is then presented as not emanating from the prejudices that the individual social worker may have. Instead it’s the evidence that is leading the social worker in that direction.

The use of practice wisdom in the formulation of asylum seekers as economic migrants is also used by Social Worker 24. According to the social worker, before working with asylum seekers, he held very naïve views. He prefaces his formulation of asylum seekers with an explanation of his political views. He unambiguously identifies himself as a liberal and in support of people’s rights as enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights and declares his support for the right to seek asylum. Prefacing his formulation of asylum seekers with his political views is a linguistic move that is relevant and important here. It pre-empted and rebuts any potential accusations of prejudice that may be made as a result of the adverse formulation that then follows. The negative formulation that is made of asylum seekers by Social Worker 24 is attributed the nature of asylum seekers themselves; otherwise the interlocutor himself is predisposed to be sympathetic to asylum seekers given his political views and beliefs. Furthermore, it is also important to note that the support that Social Worker 24 gives to asylum seekers is a qualified one. The absence of unqualified support for asylum seeking is attributed to the social worker’s experiences in practice:

Working with asylum seekers has reinforced the view; with people whom I believe come here because they require asylum. Now, out of, umm; I am not sure of the proper percentages, I am convinced that of all the people I came across, maybe half, even a third of the people I have worked with over the years, are all people who are here for the purpose of asylum. I suppose I have become cynical over the course of working with asylum seekers. It would be stupid, unobservant or naïve or how you want to put it, to have not picked that there are a lot of people who are here for a lot of other reasons.

In this instance, practice wisdom is presented as having decisively influenced Social Worker 25's construction of asylum seekers as predominantly economic migrants.

Discussion

This chapter has demonstrated how asylum seeking service users and their circumstances are constituted and categorised by social work professionals through an exploration of the various rhetorical devices they deploy to achieve this. Various linguistic devices are deployed to construct asylum seekers in both negative and positive terms. Because to the wider professional context within which these discourses take place the pro- and anti- asylum seeking dichotomy, which is relatively pronounced in media and parliamentary discourses, is not readily identifiable here. This can also be attributed to the impact of social work values and ethos as well as codes of conduct which make it difficult for social work professionals to express racist or oppressive sentiments. As such, any views that construct asylum seekers in a less favourable light are carefully formulated within the bounds of Billig's (1988) reasoned prejudice framework. Furthermore, this chapter has also demonstrated that social work professionals draw on media and parliamentary discourses in their

constructions of asylum seekers. In fact, attempts by social work professionals' to construct asylum seekers in a positive light are oriented to macro anti asylum seeking discourses in parliament, media as well as wider public opinions. As such the social workers' discourses are also argumentatively organised to explicitly or implicitly undermine or rebut alternative or opposing accounts. In a similar manner, those accounts that construct asylum seekers in a negative light also draw on the macro discourses. Therefore, the manner in which social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets for intervention can best be understood if the discourses are analysed in their respective argumentative contexts which take into consideration those accounts that they are oriented to. This is also very evident in the next chapter which explores the ways in which social work professionals' accounts are worked up to justify and defend their practice with asylum seekers.

Chapter 7 : ACCOUNTING PRACTICES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

Introduction

This chapter will focus primarily on the linguistic strategies that are deployed by social work professional in their attempts to justify and defend their practice with asylum seeking service users. Here, the social work professionals' accounts are examined for the action orientation of their accounts; what are the respondents *doing* in their accounts? This involves exploring the various ways in which the social work professionals' accounts achieve specific actions such as discrediting, blaming, justifying and excusing. A key concern of this chapter is highlighting veracity or factual status as a concern for the social work professionals who were interviewed for this study. As such, the interest is in how practice is "described and explained, how factual reports are constructed [and] how cognitive states are attributed" (Edwards and Potter, 1992, p.2) by social work professionals in their attempts to render their versions credible and difficult to undermine. Deriving from Edwards and Potter (1992), Hepburn (2003, p.181) has developed a "reality production kit" which comprises of a set of rhetorical devices that people tend to deploy and work up in their accounts to present the accounts as *real* and manage issues of accountability as well as achieve other acts including blaming. As these will be referred to in this chapter, it is worth briefly describing them here:

- i. *Category entitlement* – this involves the construction of talk as coming from a category that is credible and knowledgeable in a way that is relevant to the claim that is being made by the interlocutor
- ii. *Stake inoculation* – this entails constructing talk as unaffected by a particular interest

- iii. *Corroboration and consensus* – respondents construct their accounts and versions as corroborated by others and that what the respondent is stating is something that everyone agrees on
- iv. *Active voicing* – use of quotations and reports of thoughts to portray the views of others as a way of corroborating an account
- v. *Footing shifts* – using quotes or presenting views as a way of reporting another's views
- vi. *Vivid description* – this serves to invoke a powerful category of witness; within social work professionals' accounts this takes the form of vividly narrating a social work case.

These strategies that Hepburn (2003) identifies are useful in analysing and understanding how social work professionals draw on various rhetorical devices in their attempts to explain and legitimate their practice with asylum seeking service users.

Social workers routinely face a number of situations in which they are required to account for their actions (Hall et al., 2006). Such situations include, but are not limited to, supervision sessions with management, case conferences, court sessions and even in discussions with colleagues. In such circumstances, social work practice is subjected to some degree of rigorous scrutiny as questions are asked and comments made on professionals' assessments and forms of intervention. During such encounters, practice may also be challenged. Of particular relevance to this study is how social work professionals manage such encounters and in particular what linguistic devices and strategies they deploy to explain and justify practice. The chapter focuses primarily on those instances during the interviews where social work

professionals find themselves having to explain or justify their practice with asylum seeking service users.

Although face to face interviews, such as the ones conducted for the purposes of this study, are not part of everyday social work practice, they however offer an invaluable “opportunity to inspect extended forms of social work justification (which are likely to take more considerable time and engage with in more detail, than say, five minutes allocated to a case summary during supervision sessions)” (Hall et al., 2006). According to Atkinson (2004, p.13), “Professional competence is at the heart of professional practice, it is legitimation, certification, and everyday evaluation.” Similarly Hall et al (2006) argue that because social work takes place away from public gaze, “it is only through telling the case that good social work is shown”. As such, the face to face interviews conducted for this study provided social workers with opportunities to discuss in greater detail their practice with asylum seekers and provided opportunities to offer explanations and justifications for some of their actions especially in view of the ethical dilemmas associated with working with this service user group. As the production of professional talk is inherently an accounting task, the semi structured interviews provided respondents with opportunities to justify not only their practice but also their professional identity. As such, one can therefore argue that paying particular attention to these extended forms of social work justification within their proper historical contexts provides another perspective for analysing and understanding current practice. Such a perspective is, as already noted, largely undeveloped as a methodology for mainstream social work research particularly within the United Kingdom.

Accounting practices in professional discourse

Professional discourse by its very nature is oriented to rationalise, defend and justify practice. This is particularly the case for contemporary social work practice as the profession has had to contend with, among other things, the media that has been scathing in its criticism and has too often pilloried the profession. Research studies for instance by Hall et al (2006), and Kemshall et al (1997) have noted how society is currently driven by concerns of risk management and how this has led to a blaming system becoming entrenched within British society. This has resulted in the tendency to treat unforeseen occurrences as someone's responsibility and holding them to account. As such it is in this context that social work discourse can be regarded as involving a 'defensive discourse' in which accounts are oriented to offer rebuttals to potential criticism even before they are made. Hall et al (2006) also note that "The professionals display competence in using professional words and formulations in their speech and writing to justify their actions and essentials, to counter actual and potential criticism and display authority." As such, this chapter will endeavour to illuminate how social work professionals' accounts seek to address this "gap between action and expectation" (Scott and Layman, 1968, p.46). Therefore, one of the central concerns of this chapter is the analysis of those accounts that are constructed and presented by social work professionals to explain and justify practice in areas where expectations are perceived as not having been met by practice.

To achieve this, the chapter will discuss on the ways in which social work practice with asylum seekers is portrayed in the professionals' discourses and in particular the linguistic resources that are deployed by the various interlocutors to achieve this. According to Hall et al (2006, p.15):

... any claims to truth by social workers, clients or other professionals have to be acted out in professional settings for them to matter. Facts, opinions and assessments have to be worked on and worked up in talk and in writing. The professional and client will gather pieces of information and comments to support their version of events and to persuade others of its veracity. Such performances in meetings, interviews or writing will require a range of persuasive and interactional devices. It is then suggested that the everyday processes of social work inevitably involve setting in motion processes which aim to produce assessments of what type of case this is or what is going on here.

It can therefore be argued that one of the ways in which such processes can be analysed is through paying particular attention to the ways in which such assessments and associated actions are presented, justified and rendered acceptable.

Central to this endeavour in this chapter is the exploration of a key discursive theme, *viz* accountability. Professional accountability is generally understood in terms of roles and responsibilities as mandated by relevant law and professional codes of practice. It therefore implies not only an obligation of one party to provide a justification but also to be held accountable for its actions by another interested party. Professionals work within rules, regulations and priorities set by their employers and also within the standards and codes of practice of their respective regulatory bodies. For instance, a working party representing social workers and social services directors produced a report published by the British Association of Social Workers (1980) which identified the concept of accountability as a complex phenomenon that can be broken down into a number of components. The report identifies personal

accountability which it defines as “a matter of personal integrity and being true to one’s own standards and values” and professional accountability which it defines as a responsibility aimed at ensuring that “colleagues remain professional”. It also identifies other forms such as accountability to non-employing organisations, accountability to the public and accountability to one’s employers. Therefore, professional accountability can be defined as a condition in which individual professionals are open to review and the application of sanctions in the event that their actions fall below what is expected of them by those with whom they are in an accountability relationship (Kogan, 1986).

The subject of professional accountability within social work has also been widely researched (Hughes and Wearing, 2007, Banks, 2002, Munro, 2004, Munro, 2005). For instance, Hughes and Wearing (2007) have noted how recent government reforms have been aimed at improving quality controls within social work and how these efforts have led to the emergence of a particular emphasis on performance accountability. This type of accountability is concerned with the monitoring of social workers in terms of their roles, responsibilities and duties. The emergence of this type of professional accountability is also closely linked with the increased prominence of social work as a high profile profession given the social problems, issues and risks the profession has to deal with as well as the severity of these problems as perceived by the community and the media. There are a number of sources of authority that can hold social work to account. Banks (2002) has identified four forms:

- Technical: accepted knowledge and skills about what works and how to do things
- Procedural: sets of rules and procedures about how to do things

- Managerial: orders and requests from managers, and
- Ethical: accepted values that govern the sense of right or wrong within the profession

Within the paradigm of discourse analysis, the concept of an account can be viewed in a broad and narrow sense. In a broad sense, accounts can be viewed as present in all forms of discourse e.g. self-representations and descriptions of all things (Antaki, 1994) as well as any passage of talk or writing (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). As Garfinkel (1967) notes, interlocutors routinely build into their talk accountable formulations to rebut potential criticism. However, in a much narrower sense, accounts can be taken to refer to “explaining actions which are unusual, bizarre or in some way reprehensible” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.74).

Within discourse analysis, professional accountability refers to the various processes and rhetorical devices that professionals draw on in their attempts to render their actions in practice accountable. Hall et al (2006) define accountability in discourse as the ways in which social workers’ assessments and action(s) are justified in terms appropriate to the prevailing contexts and events. As such, this chapter is concerned with how social work practice with asylum seekers is defended and justified by various respondents as well as the effect of doing so. However, following Potter and Wetherell (1987, p.81), it is accepted that accounts referred to in this chapter occur in sequences and as such are not treated as located in specific sets of utterances. Thus the analysis takes into consideration these accounts within the context of the discursive encounter as a whole. It is also important to note that this study does not seek to comment on the accuracy of accounting practices themselves. Rather, the interest is in

investigating how the accounting practices are achieved and with what effects. This interest is in the linguistic devices that are deployed whenever an aspect of social work practice is subjected to evaluative enquiry. As such, the statements that are then made by the interlocutors to account for their practice are a central concern of this chapter. There is also a need to point out that social work professionals produce accounts of their day to day practice but are largely unaware of the methods they employ to construct such accounts as well as the strategies they deploy in defending their positions regarding their practice; this is what Garfinkel (1967, p. 180) refers to as “the seen but unnoticed”. This type of accounting is ubiquitous in narratives of everyday practice as social workers draw on their professional theories, practice experience, macro societal discourses and common sense for explanations. It is also important to emphasise that the distinction that is attempted in this chapter between excuses that are offered and the blame work that is undertaken by social work professionals in their attempts to justify and defend practice is primarily meant to offer a useful heuristic for understanding the accounting practices. Otherwise, within the respondents’ accounts themselves, the forms of accounting often merge into another and at times both can be found within one account in which a respondent shifts from one form of accounting to the other.

Defences in Professional Discourse

For the purposes of this study, three main discursive strategies that are employed by respondents in their attempts to justify, defend and rationalise practice are explored. The analysis centres on the justifications and excuses that are offered, as well as the attribution of blame by social work professionals in their attempts to explain current service provisions. Scott and Lyman (1968, p.47) define excuses as “accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies

full responsibility”. Similarly, Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 75) define excuses as “accounts which admit that the relevant act was bad in some way, but claim performance was influenced or caused by some external agency”. Within the accounts that are discussed in this chapter, respondents admit that current services for asylum seeking service users fall below expectations but attribute this to mainly exogenous factors which they argue constrain their practice. On the other hand, according to Potter and Wetherell (1987), justifications do not involve the denial of responsibility but are mainly anchored on the claims that the actions in question are in fact “good, sensible or at least permissible in the circumstance(s)”. The attributions of attribution of blame can be seen in those accounts in which practice is explained by respondents as due to omissions or commissions for which the individuals can be held responsible (Hall et al., 2006).

It is primarily through these strategies that the professionals interviewed for this study attempt to rationalise, justify and defend their practice with a view to portraying it as an understandable and somewhat acceptable outcome of an otherwise competent practice. According to Sarangi and Roberts (1999, p. 36), “When professionals talk about responsibility, they tend to look ‘elsewhere’ for attributing blame and for justifying the current state of affairs. Mistakes, uncertainty, and lack of knowledge, all of which might be seen to damage professional credibility, need to be strategically managed. What counts as professional knowledge is not only the overt display of learned facts or accumulated experience. It is a result of delimiting the boundaries of appropriate knowledge and contextualising professional knowledge as working within constraints that put pressure on its authority”.

A number of justifications are offered for the current quality and levels of social work input by respondents including the following:

- i. We do the best we can within the context of existing severe constraints that are primarily outside the control of social work
- ii. Asylum seekers are essentially coping families that do not meet the criteria for the provision of services that are more intensive than are currently provided,
- iii. Differential treatment is not necessarily a 'bad thing', and
- iv. When all is said and done this is a safety net we are providing in spite of all constraints.

These are discussed in detail in turn.

We do the best we can

Some of the respondents interviewed for this study acknowledge that in terms of service provisions, a lot more *could* and *should* be done for asylum seeking service users. It should be noted that openly acknowledging these gaps in current service provisions implies a level of blameworthiness on the part social work. On moral and ethical levels, it is the responsibility of social work to ensure that service users get as best a service as they can get. Therefore the admission creates moral, ethical and ideological dilemmas for social work. To admit that service users are not getting a good service begs the question of why social work professionals are standing by and not doing much about it, especially given social work's orientation towards the social justice agenda. It also calls into question the competence of the individual social work practitioners. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement itself accomplishes significant rhetorical work. By acknowledging the gaps in current service provisions, respondents are able to provide themselves with *spaces* to explain and justify their practice. Studies by Lipsky (2010) and Pease et al (2003), within social work professionals'

discourses, front line workers will refer to the disjunction between their desires and the actual forms of practice, and in so doing they open up spaces for resistance and disquiet. At the meso level, this sense of disquiet and to some extent a form resistance to the organisational and institutional demands is well articulated in wider social work research and discourses which discuss the rise of managerialism in social work (Harris, 1998, Exworthy and Halford, 1998, Lymbery, 1998), the associated targets and performance culture in contemporary social work practice, and the consequent loss of practitioner autonomy (Webb, 2001, Lymbery, 2001, Beresford and Croft, 2004). The respondents that participated in this study were very clear that the ethical dilemmas that they encounter stem from the organisational structures, legislative frameworks, and policy provisions that regulate their practice, and these issues were distinctly at odds with the practitioners' personal beliefs of how asylum seekers should be treated as well as social work's orientation towards the social justice agenda. Significantly respondents' accounting practices cited in this study produce a version of competent social work which absolves professionals of potential charges of being individually involved in discriminatory and oppressive practice as well as complicity in unethical practices. This is achieved through practitioners producing a version of social work practice that is deeply embedded in and influenced by organisational structures, legislative and policy provisions as well as prevailing discourses.

The lack of an intensive input is justified on the basis of existing language barriers that asylum seeking service users present. This justification is offered within the overall context of resource constraints that characterise welfare provisions in Scotland

especially given the current economic environment. For instance, Social Worker 4 is of the view that;

... it will be easier if we had better access to translation services and things like that. That is an issue for us because if we are dealing with families who perhaps don't speak English and lot of them don't and are not trying to. If you want to ask just one question from a family, trying to get an interpreter to just ask the one question you have to book some weeks in advance, you know. I know there is Language Line and things like that but they are very expensive and it can be very difficult if you have just one question you need to ask and you think do I need to ask it. It kind of comes down to that because the interpretation side of things is pretty hard for people. I don't know how they can change that. But that's probably; I said to you, we get people coming in once a week for money and these people don't speak English and we are literally, and I have done that myself at down in [name of social work area office]; we go down and we get them to sign a form and kind of go 'hi' and you know 'bye' and that's kind of it; that's the level of conversation we can actually have because without booking an interpreter to come in once a week there is no conversation we actually have. Language is a problem.

The deployment of mitigation strategies here is quite effective. Social worker 4 clearly identifies herself as largely dissatisfied with the state of current practice. Earlier in the interview, with regards to the state of current practice with this client group, Social Worker 4 had expressed the view that "I think we can do a better job if

we had more time and if it wasn't for the eligibility side of things. I think our point of view is it will be nice to see something being done with asylum seekers". However in the extract above the realities of everyday practice are portrayed as *forcing* social work professionals into a situation where they can only engage with this service user group at a superficial level. It is also very strategic and relevant that Social Worker 4 in spite of her declared good intentions admits that "I have done that myself ..." i.e. engage with clients superficially which in other circumstances can be perceived as evidence of bad practice. Such a linguistic move serves to emphasise the existing constraints to good practice; otherwise as she states, "In a perfect world, we would all be out there doing lovely work with families". Therefore, the fact that practice is reduced to getting asylum seeking service users to signing forms "and you go 'hi' and you know 'bye'..." is portrayed as a more acceptable and understandable state of affairs as practice is depicted as severely constrained by factors outside the control of social work. In order to illustrate this further, the practicality of translation services in their current form is brought into question e.g. it is impossible to provide a translator for every different dialect out there every time when one is needed.

Furthermore, service users' attitudes and ways of life are also pointed out as further constraining practice. In the extract above, Social Worker 4 also attributes blame to asylum seeking families who are portrayed as not making an effort to learn and speak the English language thereby making it even more difficult for social work professionals who are presented as doing the best they can for this service user group under very difficult circumstances. Blaming service users is an important strategy in the respondent's attempt to justify practice. As Juhila et al (2009, p.7) notes professionals construct service users as "blameworthy by appealing to actions that the

clients themselves could control: they could change their ways of living and attitudes if they wanted to". In holding service users as accountable for their behaviour, this discursive strategy has the effect of depicting social workers as *responsible* professionals who have done all they can only for their good work to be undermined by *irresponsible* service users (Juhila et al, 2009). This means that inevitably moral judgements are made and categories are constructed within the accounting process (Hall et al; 2006). For instance, in the above extract, those asylum seeking families who "don't speak English, and a lot of them don't, and are not trying to" are categorised as *difficult clients*.

A similar discursive strategy is also adopted by Social Worker 12 in his discussion of a young person whom he was working with who is presented as difficult to work with and requiring more input than a social worker would normally be able to provide. He states that:

When he came he said he didn't speak any English and spoke a very strange dialect of Kurdish so it was difficult for us to even get a translator. All he could do was get up in the morning and shower, that's what he would be able to do. So he couldn't cook for himself, shop or travel or go on the bus. So that sort of input he would need in terms of support was much more than we have got to do. I mean, I have some of these unaccompanied minors on my caseload, I could spend a day and half a week on that one young person, but actually I have another twenty on my caseload to look after at the same time (Social Worker 12).

This formulation of the *difficult* practice with this client group is completed by the construction of the moral character of the client. Social work practice is presented as generally a complicated task that is made even more difficult by the fact that asylum seeking service users are not forthcoming with information. Social Worker 12 states that, “They don’t tell me the truth. My clients don’t tell me the truth. In fact they rarely do”. The same sentiments are also echoed by Social Work 13 who states that:

We don’t know if this young person has been trafficked. We don’t know if her story is correct as she came with her mother and her mother has abandoned her. There is a whole lot we don’t know umm if she has been coached or this is a proper story she has been told to say. And she doesn’t give much information away and I feel like we are building this giant jigsaw of this girl’s life.

In addition, asylum seeking service users are also constructed as quite reluctant to engage with social work. According to Social Worker 4, a lot of the families only “come and collect their money every week and don’t really want that involvement”. Kohli (2009) notes that silence and low levels of engagement can be predominant features of the relationship between unaccompanied asylum seeking children and social workers. Instead of merely signifying a reluctance to engage with social workers whom they may perceive as authority figures, the silence that unaccompanied asylum seekers may present is a much more complex issue. It is therefore important that social workers understand the purposes that silence serves in such circumstances. Kohli (2009) argues the emergence and maintenance of silence and secrets by unaccompanied asylum seeking children can be viewed as “part of a process of healing, as well as concealing and managing the confusion and disorder generated by forced migration”. He offers a number of reasons for such silence which include:

- Social workers could be viewed as authority figures that cannot be trusted
- It is possible that due to the traumatic nature of their past and experiences, unaccompanied minors may be too shocked to talk about them
- Many may have been instructed not to disclose too much information by those who facilitated their journeys “so that their applications for asylum were not jeopardised by revealing fragments that might have undermined their formal claim” (Kohli, 2009, p.115)
- They could be too unsettled and psychologically not in a position to reflect on their earlier experiences
- It could simply be a case where they want to get on with their lives and the practicalities of adolescent life in the host country.

Therefore, the construction of unaccompanied asylum seeking children as difficult to engage has to be understood within the context of the various purposes that silence serves. In fact, it can be argued that during this stage of the process of claiming sanctuary, “children and young people stand at the borders of legal, practical and psychological safety. They are least likely at this stage to feel in charge of their trajectories, and as such, may remain on guard, muted and circumspect; watching for ways their stories of arrival may be tested” (Kohli, 2011, p.314). Within such a context, the actions of unaccompanied asylum seeking children are somewhat understandable.

Nonetheless, in all these formulations very important character work is undertaken by the respondents to show what type of clients social work professionals are having to work with and significantly how this complicates practice and impinges on possible outcomes. The effect of such categorisation work and moral construction of the

service user in this way is that it not only implicates asylum seeking families in their own marginalisation and maltreatment but it also provides a rationale and framework for understanding current state of practice and renders it as an understandable outcome. Emphasising on the agency of asylum seeking service users has the effect of drawing attention away from locating of the blame within social workers' practice as the argument is put forward that this is not about social workers not helping asylum seekers, rather it is about asylum seekers making it particularly difficult for social workers to help them.

It is also pointed out that despite the lack of resources that is attributable to the state of the world economy, social work professionals still strive to get as best a service they can for asylum seeking service users. According to Social Worker 1, "It is increasingly difficult with very little money, very limited resources. It's very difficult to offer practical support to these people ... We do the best we can in very difficult, very restricted circumstances." The next extract from Social Worker 6 clearly illustrates this point;

Maybe one issue would be that they are only temporary flats and these may be available in deprived areas such as blocks of flats where there may be more racism generally. It is true; they are some people who prey on them. I know some of my clients have been attacked. That may be a problem but on the day there may not be an alternative. It will be a case of that flat or none.

Here Social Worker 6 structures the argument in such a way that it counters potential criticism or blame. There is the potential that someone may question the rationale behind allocating housing to asylum seekers in areas where they will be victimised.

The respondent puts this beyond her control and down to lack of resources and choice. Therefore, while articulating the plight of asylum seekers, the respondent simultaneously defends her own practice. The underlying argument here is that social work is not complicit in fostering negative outcomes for asylum seekers but is forced by circumstances outside the profession's control i.e. resource constraints – this is the best that is achievable under the prevailing difficult circumstances “... on the day, there may be no alternative. It will be a case of that flat or none.” As a result, Social Worker 6 is able to persuasively produce a competent version of her practice that does not show her as complicit in the placement of service users in areas where they would be targeted and racially abused. By emphasising in her formulation the lack of choice and the arising complications in the intervention process, Social Worker 6 is able to side step potential criticism as the inevitability of the allocation of housing in the deprived areas is made available as an outcome of the dilemmas of everyday practice faced by an otherwise competent social work professional.

Similarly, by using more or less the same linguistic strategies, Social Worker 13, in the next extract, also produces a competent version of her practice that does not show her as complicit in the placement of a child in a trans cultural foster placement which clearly did not meet the child's cultural and religious needs:

So my initial experience of working with this girl was that I had to find her an emergency placement; which was dire because I could not really. There was nobody to meet her ethnic, cultural and religious needs. You know we are really short of resources in [this city] and to find somebody from that culture, that country and from the same religion was impossible but we needed to find a placement

really really quickly. So we found this young person a foster placement but it's not ideal. That's kind of my experience of working with a young girl who comes from [African country] who living with white foster carers, who are non-Muslim and it's hard and I feel like I am not meeting her needs in many ways than one. This is my first experience and only experience that I have had and it's been so frustrating in many respects because I feel I am fighting the system for this young person and I am not meeting some of her basic needs such as education and health because I just come up against this wall of bureaucracy all the time (Social Worker 13).

Again, lack of resources and lack of choice are provided as justification for and highlighted as significantly impacting on the social worker's practice. Interestingly, the potential blame regarding the unsuitability of the placement is side stepped not only by highlighting the existing constraints but also by maintaining that the placement itself remains essentially a short term "emergency placement" as this serves to further emphasises the social worker's awareness of the unsuitability of the placement in meeting the young person cultural and religious needs. In terms of positive self-representation, Social Worker 13 portrays herself as being in a battle *fighting* the young person's corner against a "wall of bureaucracy all the time". The effect of using the metaphors of a battle and huge wall in this formulation is that it underscores not only Social Worker 13's good intentions but also the fact that the social worker is doing the best she can for this young person such that any shortcomings in the social worker's practice become excusable.

Another linguistic strategy deployed by respondents in their attempts to portray themselves as doing the best they can for their clients, is by categorising themselves as professionals who are lacking in a specific specialised skill. Thus, an additional context for justifying practice is also provided in which social work training is presented as not having fully prepared social workers for the complex realities of practice. As such they are resorting to having to learn as they go along. For instance, Social Worker 14 feels that she is:

... on a massive learning curve. Just now I am having to read up on it. I didn't get taught on it at university and it was never covered. I am on a huge learning curve. Yeah, lots of stuff even about UK immigration law. You know; everything because people are looking to me for the knowledge because they don't have the knowledge either. I have had to enlighten education and health professionals about where to stand. For instance, the young person I am working with just now, everybody seems to think we shouldn't offer this young person a service when she turns 16. However, she comes under the immigration law and she is a minor until she turns 18. So I am seriously on a huge learning curve and trying to scratch for reading material but I don't think I was prepared well for it at university. It was kind of one of my first cases as a social worker.

Furthermore, the respondents emphasise the difficulties they face by making an analytic link between the apparent lack of adequate training and the absence of policy to guide practice particularly for such complex cases. For instance, Social Worker 5 explains the difficulties she faces when dealing with no recourse to public funds cases in the following terms:

But with no recourse to public funds cases we have been left with not knowing what to do. It's about you know, 'Ah no not another family', you know. Battling for money, battling with managers, nagging for money for families and it's quite stressful. If we knew we would ask for a certain amount and it will be consistent for every family and it will be fine. But there is a lot of inconsistency. And trying to battle for every family and I think that's what makes social workers go; Ah no, you know. And you know, we are not experts in that field and it's quite stressful. You don't really umm, know; at university I didn't get any training in that. You are kind of lacking in skill.

Making this analytic link does not only serve to emphasise the existing constraints to good practice, but crucially it underscores the good intentions of the individual social work professionals and the fact that they are doing the best they can for their service users. As already noted the use of metaphors of a battle further illustrates the respondents' commitment to asylum seeking service users, which renders any shortcomings in their practice understandable and excusable. The use of active voicing here also provides a way of corroborating the frustrations and difficulties that Social Worker 5 experiences with those of the other practitioners. This adds to the veracity of the account. Implicit within this construction is fact that the problems that Social Worker 5 experiences are experienced by other social work professional she works with and also that they share the same sentiments and views.

The complexity of cases of asylum seeking users is drawn on by respondents, in addition to the other constraints already discussed, to explain the current state of

practice. Social Worker 1 explains the difficulties that he faces whilst working with asylum seekers as due to the fact that other social workers are:

... frightened by not being sure what to do here, instead of asking; how can I help, what I do or what can we do to support you through whatever? Instead they say someone else can deal with that. I don't think that is particularly oppressive or racist, but I think people are generally just, umm, frightened because they just don't know what to do. This is a person with an asylum tag or immigration tag or article 3 or whatever it is. So, oh, I don't know about that. So instead of support, people withdraw or they pass it on to someone else. We are the right people; social workers. We should be able to help, but because it is so complex, I think, they just get scared and they don't do anything at all.

Overall Social Worker 1 feels that the level of service provision for asylum seekers is generally of an acceptable standard, although it could be better. However, the account that Social Worker 1 provides above presents an ideological dilemma for the respondent; to admit to racist and oppressive practices by other social work professionals would directly undermine his assertion that the service level is generally satisfactory. As such, he attends to this dilemma by offering excuses for the shortcomings he cites. This is achieved through Social Worker 1 minimising the levels of concern by arguing that there is nothing sinister in the motives of the social work professionals involved. He argues that there is nothing "particularly oppressive or racist, but I think people are generally just, umm, frightened because they just don't know what to do". The implied lack of specialised training and knowledge here serves to provide the excuse. Therefore, the fact that social workers "get scared", "withdraw"

and pass on cases of asylum seekers is presented as not oppressive or racist but rather an understandable response in the light of the mitigating factors.

To sum up, the ‘unacceptable’ or unsatisfactory levels of social work provision that asylum seekers receive is presented by respondents as an inevitable outcome of the dilemmas of everyday practice that are faced by otherwise competent social work professionals who are having to contend with various constraints. By providing such accounts of competent social work practice, respondents are able to side step potential charges of discriminatory or oppressive practice. Significantly, they absolve themselves charges of being complicit in the maltreatment and marginalisation of asylum seeking service users. Instead, respondents portray themselves as fighting asylum seekers corner as they have best intentions and doing the best they can under a very difficult practice environment.

The coping family

Another linguistic strategy deployed by respondents to justify practice is by categorising accompanied asylum seeking children as belonging to families that are coping and largely meeting the needs of the child. This is achieved by drawing on the thresholds for provision of services as a discursive resource to explain and justify practice. As a way of justifying practice, respondents categorise asylum seeking families as essentially coping and as such are not in need of higher levels of intervention.

In order to achieve this, one of the strategies adopted in the categorisation of this client group is the constitution of asylum seeking families as resilient. The ability of

the families to thrive in the face of adversity is emphasised. For instance, Social Worker 7 characterises asylum seekers in the following terms:

I am always amazed by people who would have come from very difficult situations at home and quite often have experienced situations of violence and trauma, and how well they manage. I am amazed how resilient they are in comparison with most of the families that we work with and have spent most of their lives here and have not experienced the same amount of traumatic experiences (Social Worker 7).

Drawing comparisons between asylum seeking families and their British citizen counterparts is an important strategy that serves two purposes here. Social Worker 7 is able to portray herself as being aware and sympathetic to the plight of asylum seekers and as such is able to avoid potential charges of being insensitive to the difficulties that are experienced by asylum seekers. At the same time Social Worker 7 is able to show asylum seeking families as faring better than their British citizen counterparts. Within that argument it becomes a matter of logic that asylum seeking families should receive lower levels of input. This way any concerns regarding differential treatment or discriminatory practice are successfully side stepped.

Furthermore, accompanied asylum seeking minors are constructed as belonging to families that are coping and as such they are considered as low priority for service provision. In fact, according to Social Worker 12, any higher levels of social work input could prove to be detrimental to their well-being and could potentially result in negative outcomes for children who are otherwise thriving. He argues that,

Actually being involved with social services is not a positive thing for a lot of young people in terms of experiences because of lack of

resources and in some ways are better off with their families. I suppose what I am saying is that we tend to deal with people who have been abandoned, abused and neglected; and the trauma, mental and behavioural problems as a result of that. So, social work groups and social work centres are not friendly happy places that people who are basically securely attached to their families and doing quite well and actually happy can come to. Because, I think, we are not the type of service that people imagine us to be. We work at very extreme tariffs of abuse and neglect and that is where we are yet most of those children aren't in that really (Social Worker 12).

Therefore, by constituting asylum seeking families as coping and their children as thriving, an argument is made that any higher level of service input would be both unnecessary and potentially to the detriment of the welfare of accompanied asylum seeking children who are depicted as 'securely attached', 'doing quite well' and therefore 'better off with their families'. To give full effect to that categorisation, Social Worker 12 then depicts involvement with social services as by and large an adverse experience for families. This is achieved by constituting social service centres as not "friendly happy" places. The effect of this strategy is that it makes the argument for higher levels of social work input totally inappropriate for accompanied asylum seeking children who are otherwise thriving and certainly not meeting the criteria of the 'abandoned', 'abused', 'neglected', traumatised young person with 'mental and behavioural problems'. Here the use of these lists is particularly effective in further emphasising the thresholds for service provision. Therefore, through categorising asylum seeking families as coping and their children as thriving, the

lower levels of service provision which they receive become justified and any concerns regarding discriminatory or differential treatment are allayed.

Furthermore, respondents emphatically reject that there is a basis for providing a higher level of service and downgrade the cases of accompanied asylum seeking children by categorising them as child in need cases. According to Social Worker 4:

I think it's a different situation for us because what we do on a daily basis is capture real neglect and abuse cases. Generally when we are involved with asylum seeking cases or no recourse to public funds cases really it is generally because they have other reasons to be in that situation but there are no actual child care concerns. All we are doing is being a bank. All we are doing is funding the child. We have been asked occasionally to recommend play schemes; we would do that as we would do for any other client. You may be right that they do not get as much help as they should but that is because we do not see the need to be involved in their lives because there is no child protection issue.

Through the use of mitigation strategies, Social Worker 4 is able to demonstrate that in the absence of actual or substantiated child protection concerns, accompanied asylum seeking children cannot be classified as real “neglect and abuse cases”. As a result, they are downgraded to child in need status and that categorisation itself within statutory social work practice entails a lower level of input compared to child protection cases. Thus, the fact that practice comprises mainly “being a bank” and occasionally recommending play schemes is presented as evidence of good practice within a child in need context whereas it would have been the opposite if these cases

were categorised as child protection cases; a category that triggers an intensive level of intervention. Therefore, the use of mitigation strategies here is significant in that it provides both a justification for practice and it also reduces the concerns that may potentially arise from the fact that the accompanied asylum seeking children in question do not receive much practical support from social work. As Wodak (2009) states, mitigation strategies help to qualify and modify the epistemic status of a proposition primarily through mitigating the illocutionary effect the utterance. Significantly in the extract above cited from Social Worker 4's interview, the mitigation strategies are an important aspect of the presentation in as much as they act upon it by toning down the possible impact of the fact that asylum seeking children and their families receive lower levels of social work which can easily be construed as discriminatory or differential treatment. Given that they are not child protection cases, the lower levels of social work involvement are presented as both reasonable and justified. According to Social Worker 4:

I don't think they get as much attention from us as some of our cases because very often they are not child protection cases. We quite happy that the child is safe with whomever is caring for them and it's very often the case literally the only contact we have with them is when they are coming to pick their money. Umm, is that a good thing or a bad thing? A lot of people would think it's great not having a lot of input from social work and not having them involved in our lives. They are obviously settled. Are we missing anything? I don't think we are missing anything because we are pretty certain that the children are ok; but we are not as involved in their lives as

we are with other cases where are concerned about child care. So they are treated differently but not in a bad way.

Implicit within this depiction is the argument that the low levels of social work input are the outcome of a considered and informed decision that is based on a thorough social work assessment which concluded that the children in question are not at risk of significant harm and as such do not meet the threshold for higher levels of input. In fact, by explicitly drawing on thresholds as a discursive resource, the respondent is able to justify current practice with asylum seeking service users as in the following exchange:

Researcher: Do you think as a social worker you are able to successfully work on these problems and meet these needs?

Social Worker 4: Umm, no. but, I don't think we are supposed to. We can't do anything about wider environment.

Researcher: You don't think it's within the remit of social work?

Social worker 4: No it's not. It's within the remit of social work but in terms of work pressures they do not come high enough in terms of levels of child protection to demand our assistance in terms of a lot of these issues.

Researcher: In terms of thresholds you mean?

Social Worker 4: Yeah, in terms of thresholds and criteria for our services. I mean if you look at any worker, and I am absolutely sure any worker you meet I will be very surprised if they have anything different to say. But, in a lot of the child protection cases we have, you may have twenty-eight children you are dealing with; twenty-seven of whom are child protection cases and one who is a no

recourse to public funds case where you are quite happy that that child is well looked after by whoever is caring for it. They are getting their money every week, we have managed to get them housing; you know they have got their basic needs sorted out but it's very difficult for us to then spend time looking at anything else that is not child protection, do you know what I mean? It's not an ideal answer because a lot of people will be saying we should be spending more time.

Therefore, the fact that asylum seekers do not get as much attention from social work professionals is formulated within a framework of a formal and institutionally accepted argument that draws heavily on a psychosocial perspective and institutional thresholds for service provision. Thus, the level of intervention is justified on the grounds that "they are not child protection cases" given that the children are "well looked after", securely attached and their basic needs are being fully met. As such, by drawing on policies that regulate the minimum requirements for service provision as a discursive resource, Social Worker 4 is able to convincingly depict the levels of input as justified and acceptable. This is achieved through presenting the asylum seeking child as safe and thriving, and as such, not meeting the tariff for service provision.

When all has been said and done, this is a least a safety net that we are providing ... Some of the respondents in their attempts to justify practice point out that in spite of the deficiencies in current practice; it provides a crucial safety net for asylum seekers without which the consequences would be difficult to imagine. According to Social Worker 12:

... this section does give security and access to services in a quick way. It's maybe not what everybody wants, but they are certainly not going to get more anywhere else because as a government we have limited money. We don't have money in our department and are having to cut our budget by 5% every year so everybody is gonna have to feel the pinch as we go a little bit further down. We have the entire country in recession and everybody losing jobs, so it's very difficult to go to people and society and say we need more when they are trying to cut back themselves. Probably the reality is we just have to suck it in and just carry on. But I do think that the statutory sector is not the evil thing that people make it out to be

By linking the difficulties that social work professionals experience in everyday practice with the wider economic problems in Scotland, Social Worker 12 is able convincingly and persuasively to demonstrate that even though current practice may not be "what everybody wants" it to be, in fact this is the best that can be achieved realistically within the prevailing social, economic and political climate. Drawing on the wider economy as a mitigating factor for the state of current practice is a linguistic strategy that Social Worker 12 is able to deploy to great effect. This then enables him to boldly assert that "Probably the reality is we just have to suck it in and just carry on" leaving not much room for anyone to criticise current practice. The current difficulties experienced in delivering services are therefore presented as an inevitable outcome of the current state of the world economy which social work has no control over.

Differential Treatment

Another area within the interviews in which the respondents go to varying lengths in their attempts to explain and justify current practice with asylum seekers is over the question of whether asylum seekers receive differential treatment when they come into contact with social services. Respondents acknowledge that in many respects, asylum seekers are treated differently from mainstream service users. For instance, in the following extracts Social Worker 7 and Social Worker 4 acknowledge that asylum seekers receive different forms of services from mainstream service user groups but these admissions are certainly carefully formulated:

Researcher: Do you think asylum seekers are treated differently from any other service user group?

Social Worker 7: I would say so. I think, I think, in the social work area where I work there are a lot of people who don't know what they are dealing with, and when working with asylum seekers are not aware of the policies. They don't know what to do. Also because they have sort of different backgrounds and in that way a lot of workers don't have a large amount of awareness of services available to asylum seekers as well.

Researcher: Do you think asylum seekers are treated differently from any other service user group?

Social Worker 4: Yes, yes but not necessarily in a bad way. It depends how you look at it.

By accepting that asylum seekers receive differential treatment and at times are unfairly treated, respondents are presented with an ideological dilemma which has to be attended to if the possible charge of being complicit in oppressive practices is to be

avoided. In this context the social work professionals' accounts can be regarded as part of an attempt to demonstrate that individual practitioners acted professionally and were competent in their interventions. As such, the rhetorical skills that are then employed by individual social work professionals in 'telling the case' (Pithouse and Atkinson, 1998) become constitutive of the worker's expertise. This is because accounts offered do not just highlight how asylum seekers are unjustly treated but are also meant to simultaneously show the interlocutor's individual practice in a positive light in spite of the negative outcomes experienced by asylum seeking service users. As will be illustrated below, respondents attend to the possible charge that asylum seekers receive differential treatment which can be interpreted as discriminatory practice against this service user group. It thus becomes important that the inevitability of differential treatment is made available as an outcome of the dilemmas of everyday practice that are faced by otherwise competent social work professionals. As a result within the respondents' accounts, exogenous factors are depicted as restricting what social work professionals can do in practice resulting in the less than favourable outcomes for asylum seekers. The effect of producing such a version of competent social work practice is that it helps in side stepping potential charges of unethical practice.

As Social Worker 4 intimates in the above extract, the place of 'differential treatment' within social work theory and practice is brought under scrutiny and contested as part of an attempt to provide a context for justifying practice with asylum seekers. In a bid to achieve this, mainstream social work theories and approaches to practice are drawn on as discursive resources to argue that the fact that asylum seekers receive differential treatment is not necessarily a bad thing. For instance, the very idea that

asylum seekers receive differential treatment is justified and presented as evidence of good practice in the following extract:

Researcher: Do you think asylum seekers receive differential treatment when it comes of service provision?

Social worker 14: Not in my office, no. It's not a situation where we are taking like a colour blind approach where everyone is the same; there isn't that. I think the nature of social work, certainly in my office; social work ethos in my office is that every family is different. So even the kind of so called mainstream groups, we have very different approaches to different families and to very different individuals. Social workers have a diverse caseload of families, so there is a kind of way of working which is a kind of tailored to an individual family or person. In that way they are not really a standalone group because they come in and they have to be put into the appropriate service or therapy or other support or child protection or whatever we need to do in that system. But, that is done according to what they need and not according to whether they are an asylum seeker and we need to do X, Y, and Z. We have certain procedures for unaccompanied minors. I was going to say that we would then look at trauma and mental health but again I suppose with all young people we work with are traumatised and that's why there are with social services. Every young person I work with regardless of where they are from or what their status is has some kind of trauma that has impacted on them whether they show it through attachment or behaviour or something else. So I suppose

with translators that is a bit different; but that's a different dynamic of working.

Within this account, Social Worker 12 maintains that asylum seekers are not singled out for differential treatment as a service user group for the sake of marginalising them. On the contrary, asylum seekers are said to be receiving the same types and levels of treatment as any other service user group. The different types of treatment that each asylum seeking service user receives is explained in terms of social work values and ethos that are centred on working with people as individuals rather a homogeneous group of service users. It is worth noting that although the respondent starts off with an emphatic denial of asylum seekers being treated differently, he ends up with a much watered down admission of some differential treatment taking place. However, through mitigation strategies this is presented as a reasonable and acceptable form of differential treatment but one that is in tandem with social work values and ethos. Significantly, differential treatment is formulated as an example of good practice that is a result of a person centred and needs based approach to working with asylum seekers. Therefore the argument is structured in such a way that it plays down suggestions of differential treatment as bad practice. Even the admission that is made towards the end of the response is not accounted for as differential treatment but as a 'different dynamic of working' which foregrounds the idea already mooted of social work being responsive to individual needs; and that is not bad practice. Drawing on social work values and ethos as linguistic resources is a strategy that effectively renders acceptable the differential treatment that asylum seekers receive.

Attribution of blame in professional discourse

Another linguistic strategy that is deployed by social work professionals is the attribution of blame as part of an attempt to defend practice. In their attempts to

defend practice, respondents acknowledge that there are shortcomings or deficiencies in their practice with asylum seeking service users. It is important to note that by making that acknowledgement, the respondents are able to side step the potential criticism that they are ignoring these shortcomings. In fact, the respondents' admissions of existing deficiencies in their accounts of their practice are in fact oriented to the possible accusation that social work could be responsible for the negative outcomes experienced by asylum seeking service users. As such, categories and their attributes are made available in professionals' discourses to blame others for the shortcomings in practice. This section highlights how as part of an attempt to defend practice, social work professionals attribute the shortcomings in practice to:

- i. The state of social work as a profession
- ii. Other professionals
- iii. The challenges posed by racist views held within the wider society, and
- iv. Government legislation.

As is the case in the other attempts to justify practice already discussed, the strategy of attributing blame to others for the shortcomings of practice is a move that is meant to deflect criticism from the respondent's individual practice. As such, the formulations are set in a context that portrays individual social work practice as competent but severely constrained by exogenous factors i.e. the actions of others. Thus, the fact that asylum seekers end up with negative outcomes becomes attributable to factors other than individual social workers' practice. As will be demonstrated, blame is attributed to other professionals who are characterised as unnecessarily scared of working with asylum seekers; a system which is depicted as placing severe constraints on what social work professionals can do to achieve better

outcomes for asylum seeking service users; and as already noted asylum seekers themselves are also singled out for blame as they are portrayed as a 'difficult' client group.

The state of social work as a profession

A perspective that is critical of the profession is advanced. Social work, despite being constituted as being predisposed to be sympathetic to the vulnerable in society, is presented as a profession that has lost its way. Practice with asylum seekers is used to illustrate this through acts of blaming and justifying current practice, which according to the respondents is otherwise unacceptable within social work. Thus, social work is portrayed as a profession that has lost its way, become impotent and has lost its voice. For instance, Social Worker 12 accounts for the apparent lack of politicization or resistance against the injustices experienced by asylum seekers in the following terms:

I know it's not really a popular view but I think social work has lost its way. I think it has lost its way in the sense that we allow ourselves to be treated badly and scapegoated and actually society abuses us in terms of allowing us to be scapegoats and the fall guys for things that are basically social problems and we don't help ourselves because we don't say to society do you really understand?

Here Social Worker 12 constructs a version of a profession that has become impotent, as it has lost the respect of the society within which it operates. By constructing such a version of the social work profession, a context is provided for understanding the individuals' practitioner's inability to effect any meaningful change in the lives of the service users that they work with. This for instance explains the inability of social work as a profession to effectively advocate the rights of asylum seeking service users.

Other professionals make it difficult for us

Other professionals outside social work are also singled out for blame. For instance,

Social Worker 13 formulates the defence of her practice as follows:

I don't think social workers per se do treat asylum seekers differently. I know you are going to get in every profession people who umm, my experience here in this team is people are quite proactive you know about that kind of thing. There is quite a mixed bundle of us you know from all different backgrounds and ethnic origins and everything. So as a team we are quite good at that. Sometimes our clients are quite bad at that and some other professionals. I think part of social work is challenging that. Sometimes you get sucked into things a wee bit like the policing bit. You don't mean to do that and you have to self-regulate and stop yourself from getting sucked into that line because I have heard comments from professionals, not social work, and I have had to stop myself from getting involved. I don't know if I have seen that kind of practice from social workers but certainly from the client base, the clients that we work with and we have to challenge them on that but sometimes that is difficult. They could be violent people and all the rest of it. It's not always easy. You do it with your car key in your hand!

It is significant to note how social work as a profession is presented in a positive light here especially through the assertion that it is not racist. Social Worker 13 attends to the possibility that some racist elements could sneak their way into the profession by pointing to the fact that the members of staff in her team are "a mixed bundle" from

“all different backgrounds and origins and everything” and that generally the team is very proactive when it comes to racism. Significantly, this is presented as a preface to the act of blaming which then follows. The effect of such a presentation is that it not only presents the social worker in a positive light but also provides a contrast for the bad practice that the other professionals are accused of and the other clients that social workers work with who are constructed as racist. In order to complete the act of blaming others, Social Worker 13 attends to social work’s ‘universal’ role to challenge social injustice and how it is very difficult to actively assume that role within the given context. As a result, the responsibility for the shortcomings of current practice is attributed to other people (i.e. *the families that we work with*) who behave improperly or badly (*are racist*) and sometimes including other professionals in other partner agencies (*only concerned with policing*). As such, it is difficult for social work to carry out its mandate to improve the welfare of asylum seeking service users. Therefore, social work’s orientation towards the social justice agenda is presented as being compromised not by the practice of individual social workers but by outside forces which are largely beyond the control of social work. Scott and Lyman (1968) characterise this form of accounting as ‘scapegoating’ as it looks for an excuse in other people’s behaviour. However, strictly this is not the most appropriate term as ‘scapegoating’ also implies that the one accusing other in the end is regarded as the guilty one.

It is also argued that, in spite of social work’s best intentions, there isn’t much goodwill out there. Other professionals are blamed for undermining the good work being done by social work. For instance, Social Worker 13 goes on to state that,

... when you are dealing with colleagues from other professions, I think even my experience dealing with education, you know; it's like they are running scared saying we can't cope, we can't cope, we have been inundated, we have been inundated. That is not quite true when you do the actual number crunching. It's not really true at all.

I think there are a lot of misconceptions and I find some colleagues from other professions quite challenging.

Within these two extracts above from the account given by Social Worker 13, there is an explicit denial of volition (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The respondent portrays herself as highly motivated to improving the welfare of asylum seekers; and that is very important not only in terms of her positive self-representation, but also it is a crucial component of the broader aim of producing a competent version of Social Worker 13's practice and her professional identity. Significantly, she portrays herself as unsupported by other professionals whom she depicts as having a different agenda which is at odds with what she is attempting to achieve for asylum seeking service users. This is achieved by the strategic use of reported speech to capture the opposing viewpoints of the other professions who are being accused of undermining the efforts of the social worker. In addition, Social Worker 13 also portrays what she perceives as a real risk of physical harm that could befall her should she try to mount a meaningful challenge. She notes that if she were to challenge any one of her other service users, who hold very racist views, she would have to do it at a great personal risk; "You do it with your car key in your hand!" The effectiveness of Social Worker 13's account as a defence of her practice depends on the strength and seriousness of constraints that are presented. In this case, the constraints do not only emanate from the clients who are presented as racist, "violent and all of it", but also the other

professionals whom Social Worker 13 portrays as also holding racist views regarding asylum seekers and mainly concerned with “the policing bit”. The existing constraints are also emphasised through the use of extreme case formulation in which partner agency professionals instead of pulling together to help asylum seeking services in need of a service are just “running scared saying we can’t cope, we can’t cope, we have been inundated, we have been inundated”. Thus, the professionals in partner agencies are blamed and constituted as an impediment to the attainment of better outcomes for asylum seeking service users. This is achieved by casting doubt on their sincerity and motivation to improve the welfare of asylum seeking service users, which contrasts sharply with the constitution of social work, as a profession dedicated to improving the welfare of this client group, which prefaces Social Worker 13’s account. The effect of such a formulation is that it undermines the prospects of success of a multi-agency approach to working with asylum seekers in the given context. In fact, the very fact that Social Worker 13 admits that she is unable to achieve much in her work, for instance, from an advocacy point of view in itself evidences how great the constraints are. In spite of her good intentions, Social Worker 13 presents herself as restricted in terms of what she can do due to the sheer weight of the existing constraints. By producing a version of competent social work whilst simultaneously attributing blame to other professionals, Social Worker 13 is able to successfully account for the shortcomings within her practice in a way that does not implicate her or compromise her professional identity. She is also able to apportion blame to other professionals including the police and immigration for the ethical dilemmas that she experiences in her practice:

... I have kind of been forced into a position by the police and immigration to almost partly police this young person in case she

runs away. I think it's just unethical for my job but because I am working for statutory social work my hands are slightly forced into something I am not actually agreeing with. It's not what I became a social worker for. If I wanted to become a policewoman I would have become one but I am a social worker. It goes against the grain (Social Worker 13).

By highlighting the disjunction between her desires and the ways in which she is being *forced* to work with asylum seekers by the virtue of being a statutory social worker and the demands from other professionals particularly the police and immigration officials, Social Worker 13 is able to persuasively portray the ethical dilemmas she experiences as not attributable to her individual practice, which she depicts as very much in tune with the profession's orientation towards the social justice agenda.

The law prevents us from helping our clients

Respondents also defend their practice by arguing that the law prevents them from being able to help asylum seeking users in the ways they would like to. The existing legislation is blamed for making it difficult for social workers to work effectively with asylum seeking users. Social worker 6 is convinced that the law "prevents us from helping people." Social Worker 5 accounts for the difficulties she experiences in practice in the following terms:

Quite often we are restricted in terms of what we can do as they are not allowed to access charities and our knowledge is very limited about ethnic groups in the community; we are not really good at that either. We can't help them about being able to work. We don't have any influence over the legal system. So I would say we are quite

limited over what we are doing at the moment, not what we can do.

There are probably lots that we can do but, umm.

Social Work 14 also feels that the current legislative frameworks for working with asylum seekers make it very difficult for social workers to work effectively with asylum seekers. According to Social Worker 14:

To be honest I don't actually know why we are in the position we are with all these different systems operating almost in parallel and sometimes even within each other which is slightly an odd way of putting it. I think the government wants to be seen to be hard on immigration because of their perception of what the public wants to hear ... They are basically in conflict with each other and because of that that's why we are actually in a mess because as civil servants we are trying write policies that fit with the treaty obligations yet somehow we seem to be tough but fair in another way. Well it doesn't actually fit when it comes down to the actual individual beings who are at the end of it all. Some of them are asylum seekers, some of them are economic migrants, some of them have been trafficked, some of them are people working in the illegal economy.

It's so complicated. You can't have one system that fits them all.

Social Worker 16 also sees current legislation as having a major impact on what is achievable in practice:

... my practice is very much grounded in the Children (Scotland) Act in terms of what I promote; the child's welfare is paramount and that is to actually take a robust assessment of whether this child

should actually be rehabilitated at home. I need the mother to be at home in order to achieve that and the best outcomes for the child. As I said, this mother because of the kind of agreements between the higher governments in terms of where that mainstream funding is pocketed through immigration, which is [which will be the in the other city], and that unless we can find some way of marrying both together if you like then what we are going to have is legislation that overrides the Children (Scotland) Act and the mother ends up in [living in the other city] and we have got the child in [in this city]. So again the immigration legislation doesn't necessarily promote what the Children (Scotland) Act does. Because I am working with children and families who very much fall under the children legislation in the way we work with them and then you have this immigration and asylum legislation competing with that. It's quite difficult and it's quite complex to work with both sets because both are vested in the legal process and who am I to say, you know. They can be quite contradictory as well. I suppose the other thing is around young people who are in the UK and who would still come under the Children (Scotland) Act but again they tend you know to go down the immigration and asylum legislation because of their circumstances.

A recurring feature in the above accounts is how the difficulties and shortcomings in practice are constituted. The difficulties that the social work professionals encounter in every day practice are presented as a product of the ways in which current laws and policies are formulated and how that is at odds with what the social work

professionals aspire to achieve for their service users. For instance, immigration laws are presented as being at odds with child care legislation (which Social Worker 16 unambiguously identifies as the framework that should guide her practice yet she finds herself having to work within a competing and conflicting set of laws). Therefore, what is presented is not just a set of legal barriers that social work professionals have to contend with, but also the resulting practical impediments to day to day practice that are result from these legislative frameworks. In the case of Social Worker 16 it becomes very difficult to undertake direct work with the family with a view to rehabilitating the child back home; social work is attempting to bring the child and mother together whilst immigration legislation is depicted as rigid and working to break up the family. In all the accounts cited above, competing legislative frameworks are depicted as responsible for the negative outcomes that are experienced by asylum seeking children and their families.

The deficiencies in practice are portrayed as not down to the incompetence of individual social workers but rather as a manifestation of the contradictions within the current laws and policies as well as government's unsuccessful attempt at addressing immigration and humanitarian concerns. Through such a formulation, difficulties that social workers experience in day to day practice and the negative outcomes that asylum seeking service users experience become attributable to the "one system fits all" (Social Worker 14) that social workers have to operate within. The effect of such a presentation is that social work successfully side steps criticism for the existing deficiencies in practice especially given that the profession has to work with a set of policies and legislation which is formulated at a higher level; and social work has very little influence over that process, as Social Worker 5 notes in her account. Thus the

onus of the blame is shifted onto the government and social work is absolved of any responsibility for the shortcomings in current practice. This strategy is particularly effective when used in conjunction with the formulation of social work as a profession that has lost its voice and is now subjugated to the dictates of the state, as already discussed.

What we are doing for them they would not be able to do it for us

In addition, the long standing British tradition of generosity towards the less fortunate is also drawn upon as a discursive resource to defend social work practice with asylum seekers. For instance, Social Worker 24 defends his practice with asylum seeking families in the following terms:

In the end I would be interested in us going to another country and see how we will be treated by their social services departments. I don't know; different countries have different systems. In certain countries they don't have the NHS like we have here. There are aspects of our healthcare and there are cases of people coming here suddenly being diagnosed with serious illnesses and are unable to go back to their countries because they will not be treated for those illnesses. I don't think for a minute they didn't know before they came. Ok, that's unfair because it doesn't apply to everybody but yeah I mean they are clever. Well done. Absolutely, you can't help but give them credit for being clever about it. They didn't go to America because they would have to pay there. I mean there are good things about our country in that respect and we would never leave anybody being ill when we can help them.

Social Worker 24 uses British generosity as a broader context for defending social work practice. In order to achieve this, categories and the moral character of asylum seekers is invoked and inferred upon as a way of emphasising the type of client that social services are looking after. Thus categories of asylum seekers that are found in wider anti asylum seeking discourses such those discussed in Chapter 5 are drawn upon. In Social Worker 24's account, categories of asylum seekers as a *sneaky*, *diseased* social group that is *a burden* to the welfare system are invoked. The notion of Britain as a destination of choice for asylum seekers is also invoked as a way of casting doubt that these asylum seekers are in the United Kingdom due to persecution in their countries of origin. It is significant that Social Worker 24 immediately follows up this categorisation of asylum seekers by emphasising British generosity by asserting; "I mean there're good things about our country in that respect and we would never leave anybody being ill when we can help them". The importance of making that assertion is that in spite of the depicted moral character of asylum seekers, the British society still goes out of its way to look after them. Therefore, by implication, asylum seekers who evidently are *undeserving* of the services that they are receiving should not complain about services that are provided; and as such social workers should not be taken to task over the levels and quality of services rendered. In any case, the quality of care that asylum seekers are receiving in the United Kingdom country cannot be matched in their very own countries of origin. Therefore, taking the focus away from the deficiencies in current practice by highlighting the moral character of asylum seekers and the fact that their respective countries of origin would not be able to provide comparable levels of care if roles were reversed is an effective linguistic move in defending practice.

An important thread that runs throughout this account is also the use of the oppositional binary *us/we* v *them/they*. Fairclough (1989, p.127) discusses the use of the inclusive ‘*we*’ in a *Daily Mail* editorial, (‘*We*’ cannot let *our* troops lose the edge ...), noting that the paper is making a claim to speak for others including its readers and all British citizens and social workers does the same here. Fairclough (1989, p.128) argues that the effect of this linguistic strategy is that it “serves corporate ideologies which stress the unity of a people at the expense of recognition of division of interest”. Thus, in the context of the above extract, the inclusive *we* is used to construct a consensus and unity in opposition against a constructed *them*, who are portrayed as taking advantage of *our* generous nature. Furthermore, important parts of this strategy also involve positive self-representation and negative Other representation. The respondent attributes positive and negative lexical items for *us* and *them* respectively. Those designated as *us* are characterised as generous people who take care of the needy and would never leave anybody being ill when they can help them. Those in the out-group *them* are characterised as sneaky, diseased, and seeking asylum under false pretences.

Having it better than our own

The other view that has not been discussed in this chapter so far is one which defends practice by totally rejecting any suggestion that there are any shortcomings within current practice. Although this is very much a minority’s view, the respondents refute the view that asylum seekers are unjustly treated. According to Social Worker 18:

It can be quite difficult for social work giving asylum seeking families £120 per week, and then going out and seeing somebody whose kids are lying on the floor, don’t have any beds and things like that. I am not saying that these people are not entitled to their

money but when you are giving £120 per week to them and you can't give this family anything and they are living in dire poverty and mum is struggling to find food weekly, and for whatever reason we can't give her money. So we are doing it for them but we can't do it for ours. It's just unfortunate.

Therefore, the argument that is advanced in this vivid description is that if anything asylum seeking service users are better off than their British citizen counterparts and that is primarily because they receive preferential treatment at the expense of British citizens. The persuasive strength of this account lies in its social and spatial location of asylum seekers as the outsiders – *them* – who do not belong *here*, are not part of *us*, and as such, are undeserving of the preferential treatment that they receive at the expense of *our own*. The persuasive strength of the account also lies in its ability to invoke a powerful category of witness; the poverty stricken British family. This is achieved through the extreme case formulation of poverty that is presented through the depiction of British kids “lying on the floor” with no beds, living in dire poverty, and British mums “struggling to find food” with social work not being able to do anything to help. This is also particularly effective in conveying the sense of injustice. Such a formulation underscores the argument being made here that asylum seekers are better off than British citizens. Therefore social services cannot be criticised for the ways in which they look after asylum seekers; they are giving them more they deserve.

Discussion

The point of this chapter is not about judging whether the accounts offered by social work professionals are ‘right’ or to judge social workers. Rather the purpose of the chapter has been to highlight how social work professionals deploy various linguistic

devices in their attempts to justify and defend their practice. The chapter has provided an insight into how respondents produce accounts of competent social work practice and how this is geared to rebut potential charges of discriminatory and oppressive practice. It has also explored how categories are made available in respondents' accounts to attribute blame to others and deflect potential criticism of respondents' practice. What is clear in this chapter is that the interviews conducted for this study provided sites where practice is justified and defended. Within these accounting practices it is also apparent that the values of social work are displayed and attended to by reference to professional values and ethos, and these are contrasted with the rigidity of existing legislative and policy mandates that govern service provision for asylum seeking service users. By so doing, social work professionals are able to portray themselves as not only having the best intentions but also doing the best they can and are also able to justify and defend their practice. In this regard, the interviews can be regarded as accountable sites in which social work professionals interviewed produced descriptions or accounts of circumstances of their work with asylum seeking service users in which there were limited options available. This renders the current service provisions somewhat acceptable outcomes even though in most cases respondents clearly state that the service levels falls far below the ideal standard and admit at times that they engage in unethical practices. Significantly respondents' accounting practices produce a version of competent social work which absolves professionals of potential charges of discriminatory and oppressive practice as well as complicity in unethical practices.

Chapter 8 CONCLUSION

This purpose of this chapter is to review the findings, to discuss the implications of this study for social work research and practice, as well as to articulate the specific contributions of this thesis to social knowledge. The research reported in this study has remained a largely neglected area of research of social work practice with ethnic minorities. By utilising data selected from media representations of asylum seekers, speeches from parliamentary debates of politicians on the topic of asylum seekers, and data collected from interviews with social work professionals working with asylum seeking service users, this study has illustrated how linguistic resources are deployed in the construction of asylum seekers and how social work practice with asylum seekers is explained and legitimated. Instead of seeking to offer solutions or recommendations for practice with this service user group, this study has taken a rather radically different perspective that pays particular attention to the manner in which social work practice is mediated by discourse. This has enabled the study to offer an in-depth observation of the practice as the study has illuminated some of the ways in which social work practice with asylum seekers actually takes place.

What emerges clearly is that for social work to make a significant difference to asylum seeking service users, the profession needs to have an in-depth understanding of this service user group. A key finding arising out of this thesis is that asylum seekers are discursively constructed. The importance of this finding is that it helps to move beyond the simplistic and often essentialist typology of this service user group. Part of that imperative involved developing an understanding of how asylum seekers

as a service user group are not a given but are constructed at various levels within society, which has been a key function of this study. According to Jaworski (2003, p.246), “it is through discourse that social realities are articulated and shaped: people’s perceptions of the world, their knowledge, and understanding of social situations, their interpersonal roles, their identities, as well as relationships between interacting groups of people ...” Such an understanding can only be achieved through social work having a better understanding on the prevailing discourses around their asylum seeking service users. Therefore, this study has treated the discourses on asylum seekers as a form of social practice. The study has analysed the social work professionals’ discourses on asylum seekers as a “socially and historically situated mode of action” (Fairclough, 1995, p.54) that is shaped by prevailing social and historical conventions. Significantly, social work professionals’ discourses are also analysed for their ability to *constitute* events and ideas on the topic of asylum seekers.

A key finding of this study is that social work continues to draw heavily on out-dated views of racism based on biological categorisation yet exclusionary discourses have moved on given the emergence of new racism and xenoracism. The study has demonstrated that in terms of discourses relating to asylum seekers, the long standing black/white dualism and the idea that people have a singular ‘racialised’ identity is quite problematic and not very helpful as an analytical tool. Instead the xenoracism framework that is provided in this study is one which constitutes *identity* as a range of subject positions that cannot be contained in a singular racial category. As Mac an Ghaill (1999, p.51) notes:

Such subject positions can be seen as being constituted by a range of narratives that speak identities ... These narratives regulate

normative subjective positions. As an individual can be located in a range of social relations at one time, the formation of ethnic identities through a range of discursive positions is a highly complex, ambivalent and unfinished process. In this way, 'black' and 'white' subjectivities are conceptualised as processes of becoming, characterised by fluidity, oppositions and alliances between particular narrative positions.

As such, the study has argued that such a framework has the potential to provide real gains for social work in terms of understanding exclusionary discourses such as those relating to asylum seeking service users particularly given the diverse racial composition of asylum seekers. As a result, the study has introduced to social work the concept of xenoracism as a framework for understanding and naming the shifting parameters of exclusionary discourses. The study has argued that current social policy drivers and social policy itself are permeated by xenoracism. In this regard, Chapter 4 has provided a historical overview of the evolution of British immigration and asylum policy. The study demonstrated that these policies are inherently xenoracist. Chapter 5 examined in greater detail the language that is used in the exclusionary discourses relating to asylum seekers in media and parliamentary debates and also acknowledges the existence of oppositional discourses noting that both are oriented to each other.

The study has shown that the politicians and media are major purveyors of information on asylum seekers that is available to social work professionals as they attempt to make sense of this service user group. These macro discourses deploy a range of linguistic devices in their attempts to construct and deconstruct asylum seekers. These constructs, particularly within the anti asylum seeking discourses, are

achieved by the deployment of vivid lexicalisation within the framework of *us/them* bifurcation in order to depict asylum seekers as the Other. The manner in which xenoracism is generated, inflamed and worked up in various accounts in both media and parliamentary discourses has been well illustrated in this research study. However, it is also important to note that this claim on its own if taken at face value can also be quite problematic. One of the implications of the claim that the media and politicians are responsible for driving racism is that the public are not held responsible for their opinions and behaviour. The effect of such a formulation is that it problematises the media and politicians whilst at the same time excusing the British public as a whole as not really xenoracist. Such an assumption would be based on the belief that Britain is not really a xenoracist society. However, the alternative understanding that is suggested and advocated for by this study is that in relation to immigration and asylum, Britain is a society in which xenoracism is embedded in social institutions and social practices. Arguably such a perspective has more radical implications and presents a much wider scope and opportunities for effecting change especially from a social work and advocacy perspective. An understanding of how xenoracism permeates through some of the media and political representations of asylum seekers such as the ones offered in Chapters 4 and 5 will provide an irritant to social work's enforcement role. Such a critical understanding of how asylum seekers are constructed in discourses that are historically positioned and act as additional frames of reference for social work practitioners is essential for enhancing practice and will certainly address the concerns about social workers' complicity in the marginalisation of asylum seeking service user groups. Such a perspective based on the deconstruction of the language that is used to portray asylum seekers not only results in increased awareness and in the further development of a critical approach to

practice but also complements current policies and efforts aimed at realising a culturally sensitive practice. Such an understanding of how asylum seekers are constructed enables social workers to question more critically their own roles. Such a critical appreciation of how asylum seekers are constructed at various levels in society will result in social work practice being both reflective and reflexive thereby avoiding the pitfall of “implementing racist policy initiatives whilst maintaining its unreflective, self-deceiving ‘anti-oppressive’ belief systems” (Humphries, 2004c, p.95).

As the study has illustrated, particularly Chapter 5, the fact that newspapers can offer two opposing interpretations on the same story involving asylum seekers or the fact that politicians may offer two different takes on the same piece of legislation is not merely a crude matter of *bias* involving the conscious use of rhetorical devices to achieve a specific effect. Significantly, the difference of opinions, interpretation and presentation of the story or piece of legislation also signifies the embedding of an ideological point of view in social practice. As Fowler (1991, 12) argues, the concept of bias “assumes the possibility of genuine neutrality, of some new medium being a clear undistorting window. And [that] can never be ...” In fact, Fairclough (1995) argues that the systems of values and beliefs – ideologies – that are expressed in language are far more subtle and embedded in the ways in which language is used. For instance, chapter 5, 6, and 7 have highlighted that the ‘choice’ of language structure over another has a much more covert ideological influence than just being a simple case of bias or simply a case of using a specific rhetorical device like hyperbole or extreme case formulation. Throughout these chapters, the use of subjective personal pronouns *we/us* and *they/them* in an oppositional binary is an

ideologically influenced construct that has been shown to have significant implications in the establishment of asylum seekers as an out-group and in most cases legitimates their subsequent treatment. According to Sonwalker (2005, pp.263 - 264), “These terms are apparently simple notions; they are invoked in simple conversation and they figure often in newspaper headlines. But they reify a deep rooted and complex structure of values, beliefs, themes, and prejudices prevailing in a socio-cultural environment”. The study has highlighted how the *us/them* bifurcation is deployed as a framework by the media and politicians in the formulation and justification of exclusionary tendencies and policies. Chapter 6 has also shown the same framework being drawn upon as a discursive resource by Social Worker 4 to articulate cultural differences and constitute asylum seekers as the cultural Other with similar effects. Similarly in Chapter 7, Social Worker 12 and Social Worker 13 formulate the difficulties and barriers they experience in their practice as attributable to the culture of the asylum seekers; and there is a feeling amongst professionals of the need for specialist knowledge and training to negotiate perceived barriers. Therefore, this study demonstrates that it is only through a deconstruction of the ways in which language that is used in the portrayal of asylum seekers that a much more in-depth understanding of the underlying ideologies can be unravelled. Yet the use of such an approach in social work research has remained very limited. It is therefore important that such a perspective is promoted within social work research and that practitioners are conversant in the manner in which language is used to construct subjectivities and mediates practice. This imperative can hardly be overemphasised especially given the centrality of language to social work itself as has been illustrated.

In chapter 5, rhetorical devices are drawn upon by various speakers in parliament to present themselves as *not racist*. In addition to identifying interpretative repertoires, the chapter also analyses the rhetorical devices and strategies that are used in anti asylum seeking and pro asylum seeking discourses and the ways in which these rhetorical devices are utilised to present a version of *the truth*, to build a persuasive account and manage the interlocutors' identities. In line with this objective, discourses is taken in this study as meaning the "historically variable way(s) specifying knowledges and truths, whereby knowledges are socially constructed and produced by effects of power and spoken of in terms of truths" (Carabine, 2001, p.274). Within this framework, the study has demonstrated that institutional discourses (media and parliamentary discourses) and professional (social work) discourses exercise power in their attempts to present what is true and false in their conceptualisations of how problems may be perceived and viewed by the recipients of their discourses. Chapter 6 also pays particular attention to the ways in which rhetorical devices are deployed for similar ends as social work professionals construct asylum seeking service users.

One of the central concerns of this study is the ways in which rhetorical devices are deployed by social work professionals in their attempts to explain and legitimate their practice. What is clear is that in accounting for their construction of asylum seekers the social work professionals in addition their professional repertoires and categories also draw on knowledge and understanding derived from wider societal discourses on issues of immigration and asylum. As such, these general and historically positioned societal discourses have a significant influence on the professionals' repertoires and linguistic resources that are available to them. Chapter 6, for instance, has shown that some the ways in which social work professionals construct asylum seekers are

similar to the media's and politicians' representations of asylum seekers. In fact, it has been argued in this study that in many cases, professionals' accounts are indeed oriented to respond to the societal discourses. This supports the view that the meaning making of social work is situated in a social, political, cultural, economic and historical context (Bulcaen and Blommaert, 1997; Pithouse and Atkinson, 1997).

The study has demonstrated that social work professionals' discourses also serve among other things the important ideological purpose of justifying and legitimating social work practice with asylum seekers. As Hall et al (2006) state, accountability is implicit in social work professionals' accounts and it runs through their everyday practice. Central to that objective is the attempt by social work professionals to display competence in their practice, and persuade others about the veracity of their versions. Establishing their professional identity is a major concern for social work professionals as exemplified by their attempts to construct a competent version of social work. As part of positive self-representation, social work professionals use a range of linguistic resources to depict themselves as having the best intentions for asylum seekers. They present themselves as doing the best they can within a context that is characterised by severe constraints which impinge negatively on outcomes for their service users. The effect of this linguistic strategy is that the negative outcomes experienced by asylum seeking service users are presented as an inevitable outcome of the dilemmas of everyday practice that are encountered by otherwise competent professionals. Therefore, the study demonstrates that legitimatisation of practice and defence of professional identity are central concerns of the social work professionals' discourses.

Furthermore, this study has also demonstrated that categorisation is a powerful political and rhetorical strategy that has far reaching consequences for the participants in the asylum seeking debate and social work professionals working with asylum seekers as they attempt to impose their own systems of classification. This study has also demonstrated that the ways in which asylum seekers are classified has serious implications on the ways in which as service users they are subsequently treated. For instance, it is significant to draw attention to how category constructions in anti asylum seeking discourses in Chapter 5 focus attention on asylum seekers' legitimacy and how in the process this draws attention away from how best asylum seekers can be helped as a particularly vulnerable social group within the British society. Conversely, category entitlements are used in Chapters 6 and 7 to direct attention to how asylum seekers are in fact treated and how best they can be helped.

Contributions of this study

It is important to clarify the relationship and differences between this thesis and the existing literature on social work practice with asylum seekers as this helps to clarify the original contributions of this study. This thesis differs substantially from other attempts at analysing asylum seekers as service users. Within mainstream social work research, there has been a tendency to treat asylum seekers as a 'given' or naturally occurring distinct social or service user group. The problem in viewing asylum seekers this way instead of a social and political construct is that it only serves to rationalise their subsequent differential treatment. This thesis makes a significant departure from the existing social work literature by treating asylum seekers as a social and political construct that has been constructed in specific discourses in order to serve specific interests and fulfil specific objectives. Therefore, the original contribution of this study lies in attempts to deconstruct asylum seekers as they are

known. This thesis achieves this by first locating the asylum seeker discourses in their proper historical contexts. Secondly, by drawing on discursive social psychology, it establishes an understanding of how social work professionals construct asylum seeking service users as well as the ideological basis of such constructs. Through paying attention to practitioners' accounting practices, this study provides an insight into some of the ways in which social work professionals produce accounts of competent social work practice and how this is an integral part of a defensive social work discourse.

An appreciation of how social work professionals construct asylum seeking service users will not only result in a significantly better understanding of contemporary social work processes but also a greater appreciation of their historical roots. The crucial role that discourse occupies in the construction and reconstruction of the social work profession is very significant. For instance, written texts, spoken discourse and various forms of non-verbal communication have played a critical role in the historical construction of social work practice, and continue to play a key role on the on-going reproduction and reshaping of social work practices. Yet, in spite of the apparent significance of discourse, research using discourse analysis to examine the dynamics of professional social work discourses is still largely undeveloped within mainstream social work research. This study makes an important contribution towards highlighting the fact that language is one of the central vehicles of social work practice. Such an approach that is informed by critical discursive psychology, which focuses on how linguistic resources are deployed in day to day practice certainly illuminates some of the issues and dilemmas of social work practice with asylum seekers.

As already noted, there is a social context within the UK that calls for research into these issues in various arenas of social work practice. In this respect, the micro analysis of social work practice with asylum seekers with specific reference to how professionals construct asylum seeking service users which this thesis provides is highly relevant and appropriate. This study then contributes to the further analysis of discourses of exclusion but its primary focus is on the construction of asylum seekers in the as yet little explored social work context.

Furthermore, by using discourse analysis as a methodology for understanding the various ways in which professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of action and targets for intervention, this thesis provides a new perspective for understanding not only social work practice with this service user group, but also the concerns about social work's complicity in racist and oppressive practices. The use of discourse analysis provides important analytical tools for identifying, unpacking and understanding the 'new' racism and xenoracism. In this respect, this thesis also represents a response to the shifting nature of the discourses of exclusion. In so doing, the study seeks to make a contribution to combating social inequality, social exclusion, racism and exclusionary discourses through its analysis of professional social work discourses.

Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing, the perspective that is adopted in this study, which pays particular attention to the specific ways in which language is deployed to enact social and cultural identities, has potential to result in real gains being achieved within social work practice with asylum seeking service users, especially from an advocacy

standpoint. It has the potential to successfully challenge and change key concepts that are used to portray asylum seeking service users. Fairclough (1995, p.55) is of the view that discourse can be used in “creative ways” to transform social practice. For instance, concepts can be defined as the categories, relationships and theories through which we conceptualise the world and relate to one another. Given that the meaning of a concept is dependent on prevailing discourses and that an understanding of the world depends on these concepts, it therefore follows that engagement with the prevailing discourses is a necessary component of a politically transformative practice. This is because, as Fairclough (1992) notes, as political and social practices, discourses have the capacity to establish, sustain and change power relations and the collective identities of groups such as asylum seeking service users. Through participating in such discursive acts social work has the potential to change the world as it is understood. Through advocacy, social work can assume a leading role not only in terms of actively participating in the discursive acts but also in striving for social justice for this service user group. For instance, as the concept of asylum seeker is applied to the individual by the immigration service or social services, it significantly changes the way the individual is then perceived and specifically it has a direct impact on the sets of welfare apparatus and material practices that are then invoked. For instance, within social services, while a resident or citizen gains access to welfare benefits and services subject to fulfilling eligibility criteria, an asylum seeker is automatically barred from accessing mainstream welfare benefits and services, and consequently becomes the responsibility of the Asylum Support Service. As such, changing a concept may have a fundamental impact on the specific ways in which an object of knowledge is then socially accomplished. It is the contention of this study that it is at this level that discourse can potentially have the greatest impact on the

social world (Phillips and Hardy, 1997) and could also be of particular interest to social work practitioners especially from an advocacy perspective.

Given the current restrictive legislative and policy frameworks social workers find themselves operating within, social workers can largely depend on their social work values in their quest for social justice for this otherwise disenfranchised group of service users. The importance of social work values when working with asylum seekers can hardly be overemphasized. It is particularly important that social workers continuously reflect on their personal prejudices and ensure that these do not impede on their effectiveness when working with this group of service users. Social workers are products of the same society, which is laden with all forms of prejudices particularly xenoracism; and social workers, may read the same tabloids that constantly barrage society with negative constructs of asylum seekers and are therefore not immune to the existing discourses.

Within social services, there is a general lack of an in depth understanding of the needs of asylum seeking service users and how best to engage them as evidenced by the respondents' lack of confidence when dealing with the service user group. Having an understanding of how and why asylum seekers in general are portrayed in various ways, most of which are predominantly xenoracist as illustrated in this study, will certainly make practitioners more confident in taking up such cases. More importantly, having such an understanding will enable social work as a profession to engage more effectively in debates around its roles and remit. A critical understanding of how asylum seekers are constructed in some media and political discourses and how this is underpinned by xenoracism will help social work to adopt a more active

role in advocating for social justice for this service user group. Such an understanding can certainly be the basis for the transformation of social work as a profession.

This study has illuminated the ever-present tensions endemic within social work practice with asylum seekers. Social work derives its legitimacy as a profession from its values of providing for the needy and protecting the vulnerable yet social workers are required to exclude the very people they are supposed to protect and care for on the basis of their immigration status. It is this imperative that represents a substantial ethical dilemma and obstacles to good and effective practice (Düvell and Jordan, 2002). Social Worker 4 in Chapter 7 has clearly expressed concern and discomfort over the enforcement role she assumes in her work with an unaccompanied minor and states that she feels that this goes against “every grain” (Social Worker 4) of what social work is. At worst, social workers can easily become gatekeepers to services separating the ‘deserving’ from the ‘undeserving’ (Sales, 2002). At the same time, this does not imply that at some point in history the social work profession was invariably a caring profession. Banks (2001, p.16) recognises the ambivalent role that social workers have always played in society both “as expressing society’s altruism (care) and enforcing societal norms (control).”

Working with asylum seekers is one of those areas of social work practice from which it can clearly emerge as a caring profession that strives for social justice. This can be achieved by effectively challenging the state’s attempts to subjugate the profession. This study has cited in Chapter 7 social work professionals who attribute their difficulties they experience in their work with asylum seeking service users to the fact that social work has lost its voice. In fact, the struggle between the state and the

profession is historical and indeed it is a “continuous struggle that is an important dynamic in the on-going construction of social work” (Humphries, 2004c, p.31) as a profession that is caring and predominantly driven by humanitarian motives. In the words of Powell (2001, p.161), “Social work’s capacity to survive depends upon its legitimacy as an authentic ‘humanising voice,’ rather than simply a conservative profession conveniently wrapping itself in the rhetoric of the market.” Therefore, as far as working with asylum seekers is concerned the profession needs to assume a radical stance and meet the existing challenges head on, even if this means challenging the very institutions that pay the wages:

The profession has a choice to make a new moral effort, to find its anger about the plight of the poor, to engage its knowledge about the sources of inequality with a new sense of imperative and urgency. Asylum seekers and others subject to immigration controls are a dramatic example of the many regarded as undeserving, excluded, non-citizens, worthy only of derision, abysmal treatment and ultimate expulsion ... It is time for a reconstruction of social work that draws on its radical historical strand and interprets this within a globalized and marketised context. The first step is a commitment to understanding the contemporary role of social work in this wider framework, leading to a praxis that involves action for change and the beating of a new drum (Humphries, 2004b, p.39-40).

Utilising research that is informed by a discursive approach in its analysis will certainly enable social work to achieve this goal and maintain its orientation towards the social justice agenda. The antithesis to this is unbearable to contemplate as it is

equivalent to what Jordan and Jordan (2000, p.142) has characterised as “enforcement counselling,” which offers no options and can only result in a sterile and depoliticised practice.

More importantly, developing social work professionals’ sensitivity to their own discursive practices will result in practitioners developing alertness to and an insight into the consequences of their use of language (Hall et al, 2006). This could go a long way towards the development of a culturally sensitive social work practice. Significantly this could also contribute towards the development of enhanced anti-racist frameworks that are not reliant on race and biological categorisation but focus on the ways in which discourses of exclusion are constituted and articulated through paying particular attention to language use. Such an addition to the current anti-racist frameworks would sufficiently respond to the shifting parameters of exclusionary discourses demonstrated in this study.

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APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What are your experiences of working with asylum seeking service users?
2. What do you think of the current government policies that regulate the asylum system and asylum seekers' access to welfare provisions?
3. What messages do you think the press and politicians give about asylum seekers?
4. To what extent do you think your views regarding asylum seekers in general and asylum seeking service users in particular are influenced by what you read in the press and what politicians say about asylum seekers?
5. To what extent do you think your views and attitudes regarding asylum seekers have changed since you began working with asylum seeking service users?
6. Do you think asylum seekers are treated differently from any other service users?
7. At a personal level and professional, what are your sources of knowledge about what you know of asylum seekers?
8. What do you perceive as the primary problems and needs of asylum seekers?
9. Do you think as a social worker you are able to successfully work on these problems and meet these needs?
10. To what extent do you think the current legislation, policies and guidelines and the available resources enable to achieve to meet their needs?
11. In terms of working with asylum seeking service users, what's your understanding of anti oppressive practice and culturally sensitive practice?
12. Is it possible to work in an anti-oppressive and culturally sensitive way?

13. How best do you think social workers can work with asylum seekers within the current service framework?
14. Are there any changes you feel ought to be made in order to engage more effectively with asylum seeking service users?
15. What opportunities are there in the current service framework to enable social workers to strive for social justice for this service user group?

APPENDIX II: RESPONDENTS' PROFILES

SOCIAL WORKER 1: He is white British. He is an experienced senior practitioner who works in a hospital based social work team within the infectious diseases unit. Part of his caseload comprised of asylum seeking service users diagnosed with HIV and suffering from HIV related infectious diseases.

SOCIAL WORKER 2: He is white British. He is a social work team manager for an immigration and asylum team set up by the Local Authority as a first point of contact for all service users who are not British citizens and have unresolved immigration status. The team's caseload includes asylum seekers and service users who have no recourse to public funds e.g. international students, undocumented migrants, failed asylum seekers, and EU citizens from the recent ascension countries in particular, Bulgaria and Romania (also known as A2 nationals), who are not eligible for mainstream social welfare provision.

SOCIAL WORKER 3: He is white and originally from one of the Scandinavian countries. He is a qualified and experienced social worker. He works in a Children in Need Team.

SOCIAL WORKER 4: She is a qualified and experienced social worker who works in a Child Protection Team. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 5: She is a qualified and experienced social worker who is originally from Australia. She has extensive experience of working with asylum

seekers in Australia and in a number of English and Scottish local authorities. She currently works in a Looked After Children Team and her caseload includes unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

SOCIAL WORKER 6: She is an experienced social worker who has extensive experience working with asylum seekers in a number of Scottish Local Authorities. Her current role is in a housing team. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 7: She is a newly qualified social worker working in a Child Protection Team. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 8: She is an experienced social worker working in a Child Protection Team, She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 9: She is an experienced social work para-professional working in the local authority's immigration and asylum team. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 10: She is an experienced practitioner who is a Team Leader for a Children in Need team. Her role involves supervising a team of eight social workers whose caseloads include asylum seeking children and their families. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 11: She is a team manager for a hospital discharge team. She is responsible for a team of social workers whose caseloads from time to time includes asylum seeking service users.

SOCIAL WORKER 12: He is a qualified and experienced social worker. He works in a Looked After Children Team and takes a lead role on age assessments carried out by the Local Authority on unaccompanied asylum seeking children. He is white British.

SOCIAL WORKER 13: She is white British and employed as a social worker in a Child Protection Team.

SOCIAL WORKER 14: She is a qualified social worker in a Children in Need Team. Her work includes working with accompanied asylum seeking children and their families. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 15: He is the service manager for the Access and Duty teams for adults and also has oversight over the immigration and asylum team. He is white British.

SOCIAL WORKER 16: She is qualified social worker in a Child Protection team. She is white British.

SOCIAL WORKER 17: She is a qualified and experienced social worker in a children and families team. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 18: He is a children and families service manager. He was responsible for developing the local authority's policies and protocols for working with asylum seeking service users. He is white British.

SOCIAL WORKER 19: She is a team manager for one of the Child Protection teams. She was also responsible for developing the local authority's policies and protocols for working with asylum seeking service users. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 20: She is an experienced social worker working in a Children in Need Team. Her caseload included accompanied asylum seeking children and their families. She is white British

SOCIAL WORKER 21: She is an experienced social worker working in a Looked After Children Team. At the time of the interview, her caseload included unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

SOCIAL WORKER 22: She is an experienced social worker in a children and families team whose caseload includes asylum seeking children and their families.

SOCIAL WORKER 23: She is a qualified social worker working in a Children in Team. She is white Scottish.

SOCIAL WORKER 24: He is qualified and experienced social worker in a Looked After Children Team. He is white British.

SOCIAL WORKER 25: He is an experienced social worker in the immigration and asylum team. He is white Scottish.

APPENDIX III: ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee (UREC) Standard Operating Procedures for all researchers

Constitution of the Committee

The Committee is based on the existing Psychology Ethics Committee, and comprises six members of staff from that School (from 1 October 2004: Professor Trevor Harley (Chair), Dr Ronni Greenwood, Professor Alan Kennedy, Dr Emese Nagy, Dr Astrid Schloerscheidt, Dr Roger van Gompel, and Dr Peter Willatts). The Committee comprises three additional representatives, one from the School of Education and Social Work (Dr Elaine Smith), one from the School of Nursing & Midwifery (Dr John Drummond), and one from the School of Computing (Dr Annalu Waller). The lay member is Mrs. Elizabeth Melville. The Committee reports annually to and is appointed by the University of Dundee Research Committee. The Committee operates a joint auditing process with the University of Abertay.

Remit of the Committee

The remit is to make recommendations and to provide feedback on the ethical appropriateness of research projects. *Some* aspects of design may be relevant to ethical considerations (e.g. research should not be so poorly designed as to guarantee meaningless results, thereby wasting participants' time). Note that any research involving the collection of human biological samples or data from NHS patients who are included by virtue of their being patients, or their carers, *must* be approved by the Tayside University Hospitals Trust Ethics Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC).

Note also that ethical approval may not in itself be a sufficient precondition for carrying out the research (e.g. the research might need clearance from Disclosure Scotland, or approval of local education authorities, parents, and teachers, or some other body; contact Dr Peter Willatts in the School of Psychology, p.willatts@dundee.ac.uk, for advice); such conditions are outside the remit of the committee. You must also ensure that you carry out any necessary risk assessment, and you must abide by all appropriate safety regulations. (Contact the University Safety Officer for advice.) You are also responsible for ensuring that your research complies with the Data Protection regulations. If your data are stored in any way such that the data can be linked to an identifiable individual (e.g. by name or by code) then the data must be registered by filling out the form at <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/recordsmanagement/dataprotection/pro-forma.htm>.

Application Procedure

All research involving collecting data from humans must be approved by the Committee before data collection commences; "research" includes experimental work, questionnaires, and face-to-face, telephone, and Internet surveys. You must read and follow the University of Dundee *Code of Practice for Research on Human Participants*.

Research carried out by **undergraduate students and taught Masters** must have appropriate ethical approval. This approval will be dealt with by another mechanism, normally at the school or college level (details will be supplied by your college). **Academic staff, researchers and postgraduate (research) students** are responsible for producing their applications to the University Committee.

All applications for ethical approval from the UREC must be submitted to Mrs Liz Evans in the School of Psychology General Office (e.evans@dundee.ac.uk) using the attached form, *both* as a hard and an electronic copy. Incomplete applications will be returned. Note that in many cases it is possible to seek generic approval for a methodology, although any subsequent significant changes in methodology will necessitate fresh approval. Copies of sample informed consent and participant information sheet templates are also attached. An ethics application should consist of:

- The attached Ethical Approval Form, completed and signed
- The Informed Consent Form (or alternative means of establishing informed consent if written consent is not appropriate – e.g. if the participants have restricted literacy)
- The Participant Information Sheet (which must be distinct from the consent form)
- If necessary you will also need to produce a debriefing Information Sheet to give participants after the research is complete (e.g. if the research involves any sort of deception).
- Any supporting documentation required (e.g. grant applications, a copy of any questionnaire, any covering letters; see form below)

Approval

There are three routes to possible approval, depending on the responses on the form.

1. *If any of the answers to Questions 10-12 is “Yes”* then the proposal will be referred to the full Committee. Note that research involving any form of deception are particularly problematical, and a full explanation of why deceit is necessary, why there are no acceptable alternative approaches not involving deceit, and the scientific justification for deceit must be provided in a covering letter.
2. *If any of the answers to Questions 1-9 is “No”, but the researcher still considers the research to be ethically non-problematical*, the researcher must write a covering letter explaining the answers and explaining why there are no ethical difficulties. The Chair may then approve the proposal by Chair’s action, or may decide to refer it to the Committee.
3. If the answers to Questions 1-8 on the form are all “Yes” or “Not applicable”, and the answers to Questions 9-11 are all “No” or “Not applicable”, then the Chair of the Committee will usually approve the proposal on Chair’s Action.

At least three members of the Committee (including the Chair) will read any proposal referred to the full committee. The Committee provides written comments on the application. The Chair of the Committee makes the final decision based upon the Committee's comments. The applicant is informed in writing or by email of the decision, and given any feedback. The decision is one of:

1. Accept without conditions
2. Accept with conditions
3. Recommend submission to another committee (e.g. Tayside NHS LREC)
4. Revise and resubmit (with conditions)
5. Reject (with reasons)

We aim to provide a decision in three weeks from submission during semester time. If the decision is *accept with conditions*, you must write to the Chair of the Committee explaining how those conditions will be met. You must notify the Chair of the Committee of any subsequent deviations from the agreed protocol. Note that the University may audit projects to ensure that ethical standards are being maintained. You should keep and file your email confirming Ethical Approval. When the research is complete you should provide a brief report noting any complaints or ethical issues that may have arisen while carrying out the research. (For taught students an electronic copy of the final project is acceptable.)

All researchers must abide by the University of Dundee's *Code of Practice for Research on Human Participants*, as well as the guidelines of any other relevant body; for example that of the British Psychological Society (on whose form ours is loosely based; see *The BPS Ethical Guidelines: Guidelines for minimum standards of ethical approval in psychological research* (July 2004).

Professor Trevor Harley
Chair, University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee
UREC v. 1.9, 15 December 2006

Checklist of common errors

These are some of the most common reasons why we have to return ethics applications for resubmission. You will improve your chances of success if you check your application against this list. Please make sure:

You have answered all questions on the form.

You have appended your Participant Information Sheet(s), Informed Consent Form, and Debriefing Form, and that these are all clearly labelled.

Any additional description or summary of the Project is clearly labelled and differentiated from the other forms.

You have run the information sheet and consent form through a spell checker.

The consent form should be separable from the information sheet so that the participants can retain the information sheet.

If you are making audio or visual recordings that you have said where the tapes will be stored and how long they will be kept before they are destroyed.

If making recordings you must make clear that you will inform the participants and obtain their consent beforehand.

You have included a copy of your questionnaire, and the lead questions if you are using a structured interview.

If your study involves deception this automatically raises an ethical concern, so you should tick box B on the form. You must show how your debriefing will explain the deception.

If your experiment involves deception you must provide participants with an opportunity to withdraw their data after debriefing.

You have provided an estimate of the planned sample size.

You have specified your participant population and how you will recruit from them.

You have said where testing will happen.

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM

Title of project: How do professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets of intervention?

Name of lead Investigator, School (or equivalent), Status (e.g. staff, student):
Shepard Masocha

Other Academic Staff involved (e.g. supervisor, co-researchers): Murray Simpson and Sharon Jackson

E-mail address: S.masocha@dundee.ac.uk

Date: _____ UREC Ref no. (LEAVE BLANK): _____

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the main procedures to participants in advance so that they are informed about what to expect in your study?	Yes		
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	Yes		
3	Will your participants be able to read and understand the participant information sheet?	Yes		
4	Will you obtain written informed consent for participation?	Yes		
5	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			N/A
6	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty and for any reason?	Yes		
7	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?			N/A
8	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	Yes		
9	Will you give participants a brief explanation of the purpose of the study at the end of their participation in it, and answer any questions?	Yes		
10	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		No	
11	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If Yes, give details on a separate sheet and state what you will tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help).		No	
12	Do participants fall into any of the following special groups?	Children (under 18 years of age)		
		Children under 5 years of age		
		Pregnant women		
		Participants studied with respect to		

	<p>If YES please specify disability.</p> <p>Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory Disclosure Scotland (or equivalent) clearance.</p>	contraception or conception		No	
		People with disability (e.g. learning or communication difficulties)			
		People in custody			
		People engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug-taking)			
		Non-human animals			
		Patients			
		More than 5000 participants			

Please tick **either** Box A **or** Box B below and provide any details required in support of your application. If you ticked NO to any of Q1-9 or YES to any of Q10-12 then you must tick Box B.

A. I consider that this project has **no** significant ethical implications to be brought before the University Research Ethics Committee.



State the purpose of the research. Give a brief description of participants and procedure (including the planned sample size and methods and tests used). This description must make clear what participants are expected to do. You must also make clear how data (e.g. video tapes) will be kept confidential and secure. Note that this description will be read by non-specialists and must be readily comprehensible by a lay person.

You must attach intended information and consent forms and copies of any questionnaires you plan to use.

B. I consider that this project may have ethical implications that should be brought before the Ethics Committee.

Please provide all the further information listed below in a separate attachment. Note that this description will be read by non-specialists and must be readily comprehensible by a lay person.

- 1. Title of project.**
- 2. Purpose of project and its academic rationale.**
- 3. Brief description of methods and measurements and how data will be stored.**
- 4. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria.**
- 5. Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing.**
- 6. A clear statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.**
- 7. Estimated start date and duration of project.**

I am familiar with the University of Dundee *Code of Practice for Research on Human Participants*, and have discussed them with the other researchers involved in the project. I confirm that my research abides by these guidelines.

Signed

Print

Name

There is an obligation on the lead researcher to bring to the attention of the Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not covered by the above checklist.

.....Date
(Lead Investigator)

UREC v. 1.9, 15 December 2006

APPENDIX IV INFORMATION PACK

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Shepard Masocha. I am a PhD student in the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education at the University of Dundee. I am working under the supervision of Dr Murray Simpson and Dr Sharon Jackson.

I am inviting you to take part in a research project entitled, **How do social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets of intervention?** In this study you will be asked to talk about your views on social work practice with asylum seeking service users. This is planned to take place in the period 2009 – 2010.

The purpose of this study is to investigate, using discursive social psychology, the ways social work professionals construct/perceive asylum seeking service users.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to consent to a face-to-face interview, which will be tape recorded and later transcribed. It is also most probable that extracts from the interview will be quoted verbatim for academic purposes in the doctoral thesis, conference papers and academic publications. However, such references will be anonymous.

All aspects of this study will be confidential. Only the researcher (Shepard Masocha), his supervisors (Dr Murray Simpson and Dr Sharon Jackson) and relevant academic staff will have access to the collected information. The collected data will also be kept as required by the data protection legislation and university regulations. The recordings will be destroyed after the thesis has been completed and fully examined, unless they are to be used for subsequent publications, after which period they would then be destroyed.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. This means that you are under no obligation to participate and if you do, you are also free to withdraw at any time.

Shepard Masocha is happy to discuss any information relating to the research study and this Information Sheet. If you would like more information at any stage feel free to contact:

Shepard Masocha

School of Education, Social Work and Community Education
University of Dundee
Nethergate
Dundee DD1 4HN
Tel: 01382381523
Email: S.masocha@dundee.ac.uk

OR

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OR

Dr Sharon Jackson
School of Education, Social Work and Community Education
University of Dundee
Nethergate
Dundee DD1 4HN
Email: S.A.OgilvieWhyte@dundee.ac.uk

This information is for you to keep

Any persons with concerns or complaints about the conduct of this research can contact the Manager for Ethics Administration, University of Dundee

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Name of Researcher: Shepard Masocha
 Status: Full time PhD student
 Research Title: How do social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets of intervention?

Funding Body:
 Deadline for Submission:

1. Proposed Study

The study seeks to analyse the ways social work professionals construct asylum seeking service users. It will attempt to achieve this through analysing the dominant professional discourses. This will be achieved through exploring the everyday practices of social workers and the specific ways in which the professionals explain and legitimate their work accounts. The focus will be on the meaning-making of the social work professionals in their formal work settings and primarily on how they view their asylum seeking service users.

2. Methodology

The study has two distinct methodological strands:

- Data will be collected mainly through a series of semi-structured interviews with social work professionals. Semi-structured interviews enable in-depth investigations of the personal accounts and feelings of the participants. The interviews will be tape recorded and the data transcribed and personally identifiable information will be made anonymous before a detailed analysis is undertaken.
- The study will use discursive social psychology to analyse the data collected from the participants. This methodological approach will enable a critical analysis of spoken and written texts as they are used to enact social, cultural and institutional perspectives as well as social identities.

3. Participants

All participants will be Social Workers employed in statutory social services by the local authority. This will include Social Workers working with asylum seeking service users, have previously worked with or are likely to work with this service user group. The interviews will be conducted within a workplace setting. It is hoped that approximately twenty-five social workers will be interviewed.

4. Respect for participants' rights and dignity

Participants will be given full information about what the study is about and what their participation in the study entails. When storing, processing and analysing the data collected from participants, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be accorded the highest priority by the researcher.

The right to privacy will be upheld through strict adherence to guidelines outlined in the Data Protection Act 1998. All records will be held in a password protected IT network with a secure backup system. Furthermore, the data collected will not be used for any other purpose other than to inform this specific study. Reports or papers that emerge out of the data collected from participants will be fully anonymous with all personally identifiable information removed.

Prior to the interviews, potential participants will be given a Participation Information Sheet which fully explains the research agenda. Those participants who are interested in taking part will be asked to give their informed consent through signing the voluntary Informed Consent Form which gives the researcher, his supervisors and relevant research staff permission to access the collected data, and quote from it anonymously in research papers (doctoral thesis, conference papers and academic publications).

5. Competence

All methods will be subject to audit and advice as necessary. The principal researcher has a Masters Degree and Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work and extensive experience of collecting research data through interviews.

6. Responsibility

The ethical guidelines of the School of Education, Social Work and Community Education will be complied with in full:
http://www.somis.dundee.ac.uk/court/policy/research_human_participants.pdf

7. Integrity

Participants will be offered full feedback, including the opportunity to see and comment on the drafts of any reports and academic papers.

8. Other Issues

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study

Signed..... **Date**.....

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I (Name, Please print), give consent to my participation in the research project

Title: How do social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of action and intervention?

In giving consent, I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the subject information statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with my family and/or friends
3. I am aware of any risks and inconveniences associated with the project
4. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my treatment or my relationship with the researcher now and in future
5. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no personally identifiable information will be used in any way.

Signed **Date**

UREC v. 1.9, 15 December 2006

APPENDIX V: REQUEST FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY APPROVAL

School of Education, Social Work and Community Education
University of Dundee
Nethergate
Dundee DD1 4HN

27 April 2009

[LA address]

Dear Sir

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

I am requesting for permission to undertake fieldwork for my PhD research project within your Local Authority. The research question is *How do social work professionals construct asylum seekers as objects of knowledge and targets of intervention?* The research seeks to analyse social workers' perceptions of asylum seeking service users by paying particular attention to how language is deployed in the construction of asylum seekers.

The research focuses on [Local Authority] as a case study since it has the significant concentration of asylum seekers within Scotland yet it is not designated as a dispersal area under the National Asylum Support Scheme. I am particularly interested in interviewing social workers who have direct contact with asylum seeking service users.

The research may also potentially benefit the Local Authority. It could potentially augment your current efforts at further developing and enhancing social work practice with ethnic minorities. It is anticipated that the research will result in the development of a practice model that may offer practical benefits to frontline social workers and help foster a critical perspective to practice as well as contribute towards the realisation of reflexive and culturally sensitive practice. It may also lead to an improvement of current policy provisions if it is perceived that there is a significant discrepancy between the perceived needs of asylum seekers and the available resources.

The project has received approval from the University of Dundee Research Ethics Committee and it is anticipated the fieldwork will commence as soon as Local Authority approval has been granted. Please find the attached Research Proposal, Participant Information Sheet, Informed Consent Form and the Ethics Committee Approval Form.

If you require further information do not hesitate to contact me on 01382381523, 07946627950 or by email s.masocha@dundee.ac.uk.

Yours faithfully

Shepard Masocha.